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餓狼伝説
City of the Wolves
RAMIREZ

REV IT UP UNLEASH YOUR FURY

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36 LIGHT HEAVY LIES THE CROWN
"GREAT" IS A SACRED LABEL IN BOXING – TWO FORMER CHAMPS WEIGH IN ON WHETHER DMITRY BIVOL AND ARTUR BETERBIEV HAVE EARNED THE "G" WORD
By Tom Gray

42 KEYSHAWN TO THE KINGDOM
WITH A TITLE NOW HIS, KEYSHAWN DAVIS IS LOOKING TO UNLEASH HIS SKILLS ON ANYONE AND EVERYONE ELSE WITH A BELT
By Thomas Gerbasi

48 TIMES SQUARE-OFF
A HISTORY-MAKING EVENT IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN WILL DETERMINE THE FATE OF A DEVIN HANEY-RYAN GARCIA REMATCH
By Michael Rosenthal

54 IMMORTAL
DIEGO CORRALES AND JOSE LUIS CASTILLO PUSHED EACH OTHER BEYOND BELIEF IN ONE OF THE BEST FIGHTS OF ALL TIME
By Bernard Fernandez

60 THE BIG TIME
JOSEPH PARKER HAS MORE BULK, MORE STRENGTH, MORE EXPERIENCE AND MORE DESIRE THAN EVER BEFORE
By Gareth A Davies

66 A MONSTER'S PASSION
A ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH NAOYA INOUE – A MAN WITH SO MANY ACHIEVEMENTS AND YET SO MUCH MORE TO DO
By Daisuke Sugiura

74 A MARVELOUS LEGACY
EVEN BEFORE HIS ICONIC CLASH WITH THOMAS HEARNS, MARVIN HAGLER WAS BUILDING ONE OF HISTORY'S GREATEST MIDDLEWEIGHT CAREERS
By Lee Groves

84 A FIFTY-YEAR HURRICANE
BOB DYLAN'S SONG ABOUT THE IMPRISONMENT OF RUBIN CARTER REMAINS A POTENT CROSSOVER BETWEEN BOXING AND POP CULTURE
By Don Stradley

DEPARTMENTS

8 COME OUT WRITING

11 RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

16 STEVE'S SOAP BOX
By Steve Kim

19 BERNSTEIN ON BOXING
By Al Bernstein

24 BY THE NUMBERS
By Don Stradley

26 RING RATINGS PACKAGE

32 NEW FACES
By Cormac O'Donnell

82 MY FIRST TIME: ANTONIO TARVER By Tom Gray

87 FIGHT DOCTOR
By Dr. Margaret Goodman

88 THE FACE OF BOXING
By Wojtek Urbanek and Thomas Hauser

90 COMMISSIONER'S CORNER
By Randy Gordon

96 FROM THE ARCHIVE

98 FIGHTLINE

Nick Laham

What is FATAL FURY: City of the Wolves?

SNK's beloved *Fatal Fury* series first hit the market in 1991, spearheading the fighting game boom that went on to sweep the industry in the 1990s. *GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES* (released in 1999) has for some time served as the franchise's most recent installment. But that is all about to change. Twenty-six years on, a brand-new entry – *FATAL FURY: City of the Wolves* – is set to arrive on the scene! *FATAL FURY: City of the Wolves* features a unique art style, an innovative REV System that supercharges the excitement, plus a host of other battle systems even more robust than before. The game also breathes new life into the series by introducing two distinct control schemes, ensuring the most immersive engagement for newcomers and veterans alike. And those are just some of the new features to be discovered! The streets of South Town are a hotbed of action, wild dreams, and even wilder ambition. Here, at long last, a new legend is about to unfold.

About SNK

Headquartered in Osaka, Japan, SNK develops, publishes and distributes interactive entertainment software on a global scale. Known for such franchises as *THE KING OF FIGHTERS, METAL SLUG* and *SAMURAI SHODOWN,* SNK continues to focus on its rich console game and arcade history.

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2025

limitless drive

Innovation in Motion: stc Group Powers the Formula 1 stc Saudi Arabian Grand Prix

In the fast-paced world of Formula 1, where every millisecond counts, technology is the invisible force driving success. As the title partner of the Formula 1 stc Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, stc Group, Saudi Arabia's leading digital enabler, is at the heart of this evolution, providing the cutting-edge connectivity and data solutions that power the race. Just as a boxer relies on split-second decisions and precise data to gain an edge, Formula 1 teams depend on stc Group's advanced 5G network to turn a flood of real-time data into winning strategies. From the track to the Fan Zone, stc Group's technology ensures that every aspect of the race is connected, fast, and precise, redefining the boundaries of speed and innovation.

The air hums with excitement as the engines roar to life. A Formula 1 driver firmly grips the wheel, while the car's sensors transmit data at a staggering 1.5 gigabits per second. Tire pressure, engine temperature, aerodynamic shifts — every detail is instantly captured, analyzed, and relayed to the pit crew. This is the power of stc Group's 5G network, enabling Formula 1 to operate like a high-tech chess match, where strategy and precision reign supreme.

It's a far cry from the early days of Formula 1 telemetry. In the late 1980s, teams like McLaren relied on simple burst transmissions, capturing snippets of data only as cars sped past the pits. By the 1990s, continuous wireless telemetry emerged, but the data flow was a mere trickle compared to today's torrent. Now, with stc Group's 5G network, hundreds of sensors on each car deliver a deluge of information, akin to a ringside camera capturing every twitch of a boxer's muscles. This real-time data revolutionizes the sport, enabling teams to make split-second decisions that can mean the difference between victory and defeat.

Imagine a boxing ring where every inch is monitored, every move analyzed. That's the level of comprehensive coverage stc Group's 5G network provides across the Formula 1 circuit. From the starting grid to the finish line, 19 fixed and portable 5G towers ensure seamless connectivity, acting like sentinels of speed. These towers, strategically placed around the track, guarantee that every piece of data lands with the utmost precision and impact, akin to a perfectly timed punch.

But stc Group's influence extends far beyond the track. In the Fan Zone, interactive exhibits blur the line between spectator and participant. Social media platforms buzz with real-time updates, bringing fans closer to the heart of the race. It's a testament to how stc Group's cutting-edge technology not only enhances the sport but also enriches the experience for millions of fans worldwide.

Just as boxing has evolved from bare-knuckle brawls to a science of strategy and technique, Formula 1 continues to push boundaries of innovation. stc Group is proud to support this evolution, connecting the Kingdom to the world of high-speed drama through its state-of-the-art digital solutions. It's a fusion of man and machine, a symphony of data and speed, where the roar of the engine echoes the thunder of a knockout blow. The ring has expanded, and it's moving at 200 miles per hour.

SELA GOES INTERNATIONAL

A NEW CHAPTER IN BOXING HISTORY

For years, Sela has redefined the landscape of sports and entertainment in the Middle East and North Africa. Now, the powerhouse behind some of the most spectacular live events on the planet is taking its vision global.

Sela has officially launched its international business from a new London headquarters. This strategic expansion signals a bold new chapter for a company built on innovation and the relentless pursuit of excellence and all that is spectacular.

Founded in 1997 by Dr. Rakan AlHarthy, Sela has consistently delivered world-class events, transforming venues and captivating audiences. Their portfolio reads like a who's who of global entertainment: the electrifying Riyadh Season, the vibrant Jeddah Season, the high-octane Formula E, the prestigious Italian Super Cup, and landmark boxing events like Crawford vs. Madrimov and the record-breaking Joshua vs. Dubois at Wembley.

And now, Sela is bringing that expertise to the global stage and to audiences worldwide.

This isn't just about staging events; it's about crafting unforgettable experiences. With a new multi-year partnership alongside The Ring and TKO to forge a groundbreaking boxing promotion, Sela is poised to revolutionize the sweet science.

This venture will offer a high-profile platform for both established boxing stars and emerging talent, and will feature a structured talent development system including athlete combines and academies, access to UFC Performance Institutes for all boxers, and utilize TKO's production and promotional expertise to deliver top-tier, state-of-the-art broadcasts and experiences to fans around the world.

Dr. Rakan Alharthy, stated:

"This partnership between HE Turki Alalshikh, Sela, and TKO will turn the page on a new chapter in boxing history. Together, we will elevate the sport to new heights and redefine the fan experience for a worldwide audience. The promotion will create a sustainable future for boxing and reinforce Sela's position as a powerhouse in global sports and entertainment."

Advertorial

COME OUT WRITING

WELCOME TO BOXING

As a new boxing fan of only a few years, it's sad that I can already have an ever-growing list of questionable calls I have witnessed in this sport. I'm absolutely furious for Lamont Roach Jr. as a result of this majority draw decision against Gervonta Davis. Roach is missing out on taking the American face of boxing's "0" as a massive underdog; he is missing out on having the privilege of WBA champion status in the rematch, thus having higher earning power; and he is missing out on becoming a hometown hero by beating Tank decisively.

I personally feel the fight didn't even need a knockdown for him to win. Scored it 7-5. But the scores the judges had would've resulted in a win if referee Steve Willis had made the right call! He missed many opportunities to at least take away a point! Davis took a knee, he turned his back and ran to the corner, and his cornerman came onto the ring's edge to wipe his face off! Absolutely critical blunder from the esteemed referee!

Anthony Emilien
Orlando, Fla.

GRASSROOTS HEROES

As a longtime Ring Magazine fan and part of four generations of boxers, with now my 14-year-old twin boys who are current amateur boxers in Northern California, we are so excited to be subscribers of this historic magazine. My dad, who has been a boxing coach for over 42 years in the Los Angeles area and is a member of the California Boxing Hall of Fame (Victor Valenzuela), is just one example of a mentor to so many kids off the streets and who make no money doing what they do. Some trainers get all the notoriety for having champions that they didn't start from the ground up and get these guys when they are already good or are already champions. Now, I will say there is something to be said for a trainer that can help a champion with their progress and even give them a few new thoughts or ideas to better their game, but there are so many great trainers out there that build fighters from the ground up. A lot of these coaches don't have the resources as others do and still find a way to make fighters great.

My suggestion for the magazine would be to maybe have a one-page profile in each magazine on a coach that may not necessarily be known to the outside world but one that has influenced kids' lives, maybe a coach in each magazine that may not have world champions but is a great amateur coach or runs a nonprofit gym. My sons box for a coach in Northern California named Gary Sullenger – he and his one assistant coach, Juan (I forget his last name), coach over 40 boys and girls at the Concord Youth Community Center. Most of these kids come from limited means and give their heart and soul to the sport. These are the coaches as a reader I'd want to learn about and what the sport of boxing means to them.

Anyhow, I know I am ranting, and as a baseball coach myself, the influence I know I have on kids means so much to me; it's what I live for. I think it could be a great addition to your awesome magazine! Thank you for all you guys and gals do for this beautiful sport!

Eric Valenzuela
Clayton, Calif.

Editor's response: Thank you for the kind words, Eric, and thank you for the mentoring that you and your father do through coaching. We will give this recurring feature idea some serious thought.

THE FANTASY CONTINUES

What a tremendous, exciting story of the fantasy fight between Archie Moore and Artur Beterbiev [in the February 2025 issue]! Can't tell you how much I enjoyed reading it. I felt like I was right there ringside in my mind. The author, Ron Lipton, is one who I've followed in the past in his other fantasy fight offerings. Each one is brilliant and a treasure for real fight fans. The stories alone are worth the price of the issue. Ron is just a wealth of boxing experience and knowledge and probably one of the best referees in the world. Keep him on the Ring staff. He gives the magazine class, polish and knowledge. Looking forward to more.

Rocky Alkazoff
Longtime Ring reader

BACK FOR MORE!

I've always stated I would rather watch combat sports – and more to the point, I would rather watch Sumo wrestling – than football. In the past, I've seen how excited football fans are when their teams are taken over by people with passion and money. Well, now I know why. I never felt more excited about boxing in my 40 years of watching the sweet science. Teamwork makes the dream work. Congratulations on the mag – it's brilliant.

Ian Tutty
U.K.

Guys, can you tell me if the new Ring mag (hard copy) is available in the U.K.? I used to be an avid reader many years ago and have subscribed online but would also love to have the magazine back in my hands. Fingers and everything else crossed that it is possible.

Tony Padley
U.K.

Editor's response: The magazine will be on sale in the U.K. (newsstands, bookstores and retail outlets) by this summer and also available via the new online shop once it is added to ringmagazine.com.

I'm so glad that the Ring Magazine is back and better than ever! The quality of the graphics, the value of the content and the excitement of this brand is outstanding. I cannot wait to see how it evolves from here. You've gained a lifetime subscriber.

Ted Lawlor
South London, U.K.

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Al Bello

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JEDDAH ECONOMIC COMPANY

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RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

KEEP IT REAL

Teofimo Lopez (with Ring belt) fired up the Fatal Fury promotion by slapping Arnold Barboza. Is their beef real?

In just two years in the boxing world, the owner of this fine publication has taken pre-event programming to new heights.

The programs created to hype major Riyadh Season events aren't mere commercials for the pay-per-view shows; they're bona fide films with creative and artistic concepts, as astutely noted by senior editor Brian Harty in this issue's Ratings Analysis.

However, as brilliant as those films are, they will probably never sell an event the way a well-timed slap or sucker punch can.

Nothing pushes media coverage and fan engagement like legitimate rivals putting hands on each other prior to settling their differences in the ring. They may not all admit this but promoters want animosity and aggression displayed during the buildup to their events. I can't fault them for this.

When Marco Antonio Barrera took a punch at Kennedy McKinney at a press conference for HBO's first Boxing After Dark main event back in 1996, I couldn't wait to watch that broadcast. When Barrera did the same thing against Erik Morales at a presser prior to their rematch in 2002, I couldn't wait to cover their second clash, which packed the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas.

Same deal when Fernando Vargas shoved Oscar De La Hoya at the kick-off presser for their "Bad Blood" showdown in 2002. I didn't like that beloved publicist Ricardo Jimenez was knocked from the stage and suffered a broken leg during the ensuing scuffle between the fighters' teams, but I wasn't mad at Vargas for losing his cool.

At the time, I viewed his unchecked emotions as "truth in advertising."

As long as the hate is genuine, I'm generally OK with the shoving, slapping and even the sucker punching that occasionally ignites at pressers and weigh-ins. These guys are gearing up for a fistfight; adrenaline is pumping when they're face to face.

I'm only turned off when the quasi-violence seems scripted or choreographed, which brings me to the

Ryan Garcia and Rolly Romero were unusually mellow at the pressers.

Devin Haney and Jose Ramirez kept it respectful in front of the cameras.

"Fatal Fury: City of the Wolves" press conference that took place in Los Angeles on March 10.

By the time you have this issue in your hands, the unprecedented Ring Magazine/SNK Games triple-header in Times Square will be a week or two away, and maybe the slap Teofimo Lopez planted on Arnold Barboza Jr. during their face-off will be a distant memory.

Then again, maybe the clip of that slap – which garnered hundreds of thousands of social media views in a matter of hours – is what pushes the entire promotion right into fight week.

If it does, what bugs me about the slap – and the ugly atmosphere that was created at the L.A. presser to encourage it – doesn't really matter. I can't fault an event's organizers for pushing anything that moves the needle in connection to their promotion.

The heated and sometimes vulgar March 10 press conference, held in front of a loud partisan crowd at The Mayan Theater in downtown L.A., sparked a number of viral moments, but none caused as many ripples as Lopez's slap across Barboza's face.

That's saying something for the 140-pound matchup that will open the DAZN PPV co-featuring Ryan Garcia and Devin Haney in separate bouts.

Based on their controversial fight last April, hostility between Garcia and Haney was anticipated during the kick-off presser in New York City on March 4. The two are slated to face each other in an October rematch if they win their May 2 bouts, and they were expected to be the center of attention. However, the combination of Barboza's vitriol and Lopez's flamboyant brand of antagonizing weirdness stole the spotlight.

I hosted the NYC event. Knowing their history, I wasn't surprised by the tension.

Here's a recap of their backstory:

Barboza (32-0, 11 KOs), The Ring's No. 3-rated junior welterweight, has clamored for a shot at Lopez ever since the former unified lightweight champ stepped up to the 140-pound division. It seemed like a natural fight to make, as both fought under the Top Rank banner at the time. However Lopez (21-1, 13 KOs) had no interest in Barboza. Top Rank reportedly proposed Barboza for Lopez's 140-pound debut in August 2022, but Team Takeover opted for Mexican veteran Pedro Campa.

After stopping Campa in seven rounds, Lopez told Top Rank COO Brad Jacobs: "Please, do not set me up with that bum over there, Arnold Barboza. I need bigger fish; it's a waste of my time." This statement did not sit well with Barboza, who was ringside.

Fast-forward to the present, Lopez sits atop the 140-pound division after outpointing Josh Taylor for the Ring championship in June 2023. Meanwhile, Barboza joined the Golden Boy Promotions stable in November 2023 – in part because Top Rank couldn't deliver Lopez – and has won four bouts since the start of 2024, including back-to-back decisions over Ring-rated contenders Jose Ramirez and Jack Catterall.

The 33-year-old veteran, who won the WBO interim belt with the Catterall victory, has done enough to earn a shot at Lopez, but The Ring champ still dismisses Barboza as an unaccomplished scrub.

I brought this background up at the presser, which sparked the following exchange:

"He's 32-0 and he just got an interim title," said Lopez. "At 15 fights, I got my first world title … and then became undisputed at 16 fights. I'm only 27. How old is you?"

Replied Barboza: "You didn't give a fuckin' right answer, bro. You beat around the bush when they [asked] how come you didn't accept this fight back then. Shoutout to Top Rank for finally cutting the umbilical cord and letting your ass crawl – finally!"

It's evident that this fight is personal for Barboza. I'm not convinced that it is for Lopez, who has eyes on the winner of the proposed Garcia-Haney rematch.

But I thought their history and heated words added enough spice to the NYC presser to move on to the other two bouts with my allotted 30 minutes of interview time. I did so respectfully and did not poke the other young bears on stage. Truthfully, I was relieved that Garcia and his May 2 opponent, Rolando Romero – both usually brash and bombastic – were subdued during the onstage interviews.

I only wanted thoughtful comments from them and the often-understated Jose Ramirez, who faces Haney in a 12-round welterweight bout on May 2.

This school teacher approach earned some nasty criticism on social media. Fans and content creators whose YouTube channels and IG accounts thrive on controversy were mad at me for interrupting Lopez and not allowing The Takeover to, ahem, "take over." After the presser, Golden Boy president Eric Gomez told me that I handled the event well but added that I needed "more energy, more intensity."

Golden Boy Media

I told him that I'm not a promoter or a gameshow host.

Six days later, I was thankfully (probably rightfully) replaced by Todd Grisham as the host for the L.A. presser. Grisham, an experienced sports broadcaster (and one of my favorite blow-by-blow boxing commentators), has gameshow host energy. And I say that with respect and admiration.

Grisham, who got his start with the WWE, knows how to command a crowd and stir shit up between the combatants. My only problem with the March 10 event is that it seemed forced. I hope I'm wrong about this, but the sight of Lopez and Barboza in open leather vests with no shirts underneath suggested a memo was sent urging the fighters and all involved with the presser to "crank it up."

That wasn't hard to do with the two macho men from The Village People, but the host had his work cut out for him with Haney and Ramirez. Grisham brought up Haney's three trips to the canvas vs. Garcia to get Ramirez to open up on the odds favorite.

It didn't really work on stage, but it pissed off Bill Haney, who was offended that his son's chin was questioned while his considerable accomplishments were underplayed in front of the pro-Garcia audience.

Grisham interviewed the father/trainer/manager afterwards, which produced the second most viral moment from the presser.

"You're full of shit," Haney told Grisham. "And I hope that this is what you guys wanted to do. It's a fuckin' circus act. Devin is a real fighter and you showed no respect."

Grisham: "I'm sorry you feel that way. I have the most respect for your son. I think he's an amazing athlete."

Haney: "I don't think that you do. I think that you are political. You did just what you wanted to do and you got it off. And that's what this promotion has been about."

Grisham: "We're trying to sell a fight here. You know this, right?"

Bill: "Well, sell it right."

I don't always agree with Bill Haney, but there is a right way and wrong way to sell a fight. The wrong way makes the fighters and all those involved look classless.

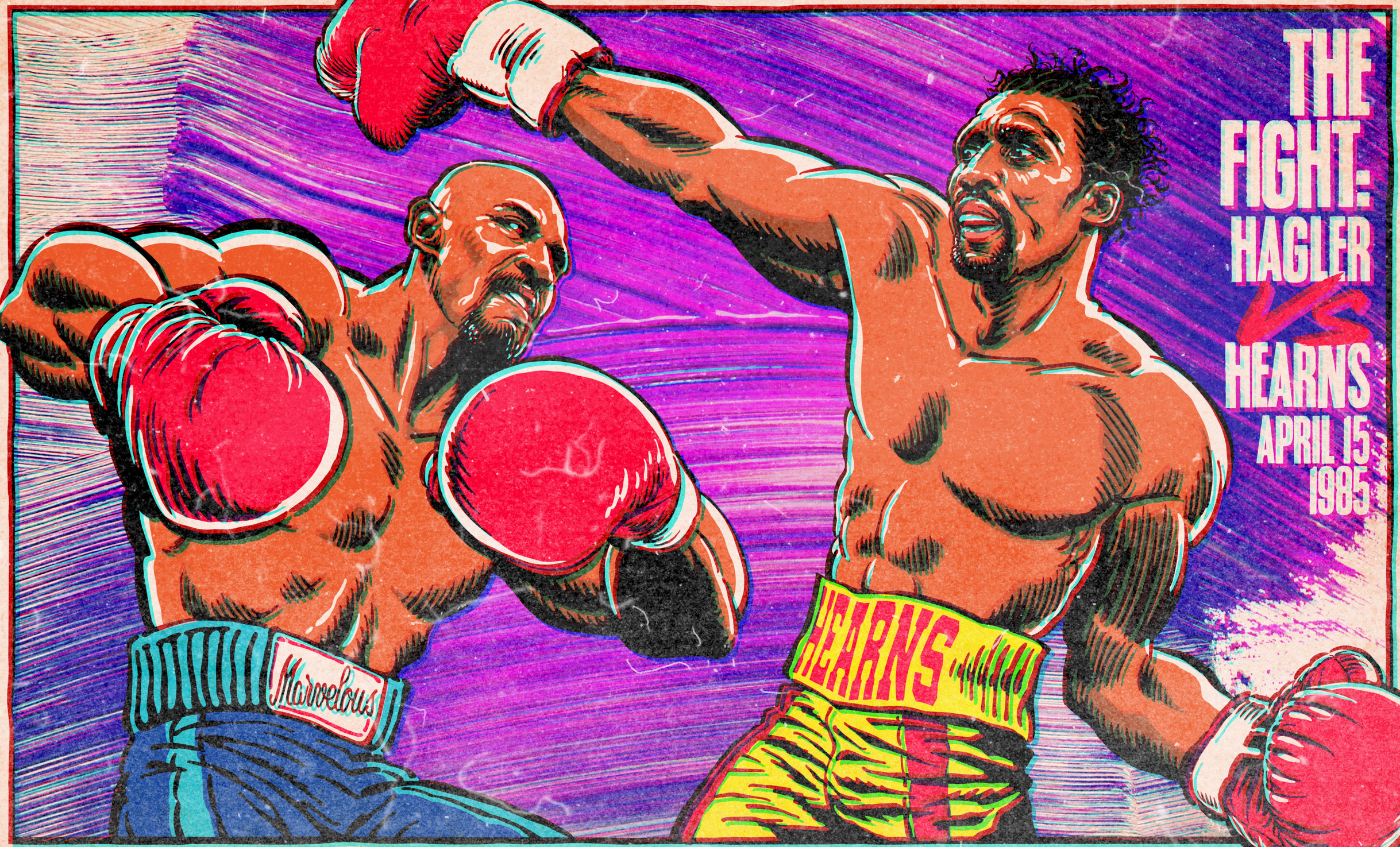
Am I being hypocritical after admitting that I was into the bad blood between De La Hoya and Vargas, and all for Barrera's unsportsmanlike behavior with McKinney and Morales? Yes, a little bit.

But here's the difference: The hate was real with those fighters and it was a two-way street. Also, I can assure you that the drama that popped off at those press conferences was organic.

The proof, of course, is in the pudding – or this case, the ring. Barrera's bouts with McKinney and Morales and the De La Hoya-Vargas showdown were all great fights.

Let's see if Lopez-Barboza delivers on May 2.

For the record, I think the fight of the night will be between the two most respectful and professional fighters on the card: Haney and Ramirez. RING



Butcher Billy

STEVE'S SOAPBOX

ONE, TWO, THREE, FOREVER

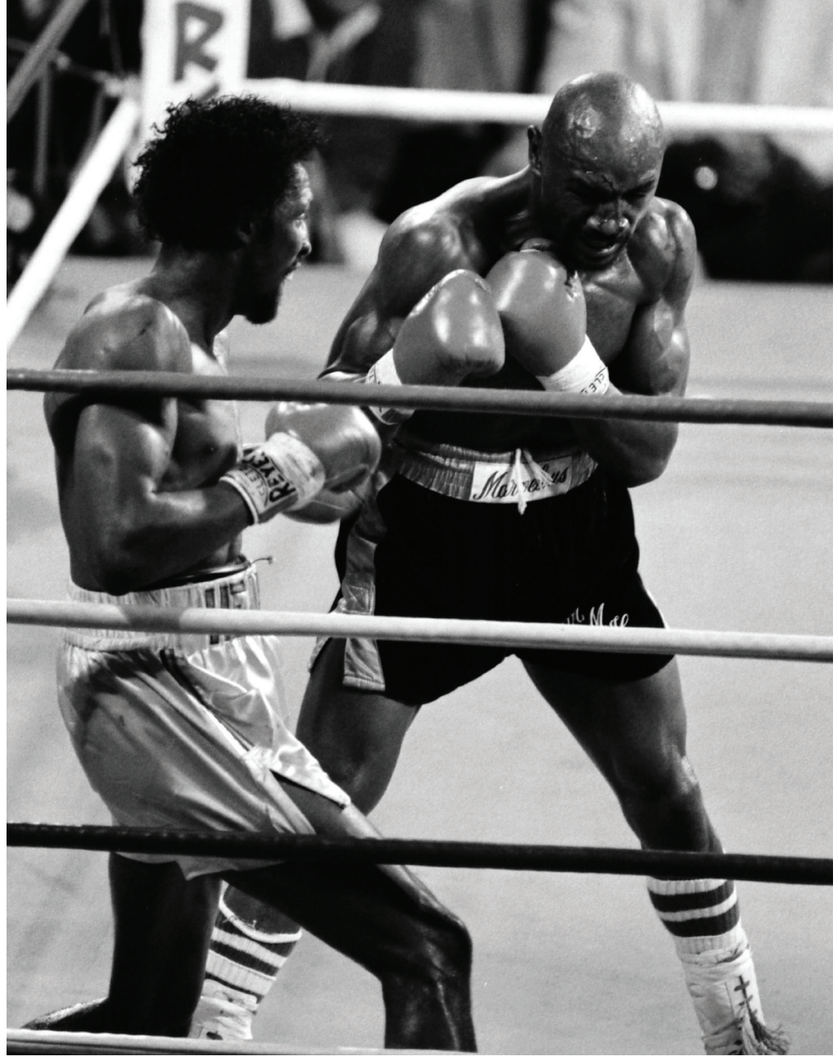
By Steve Kim

For most Americans, April 15 means that taxes are due. For many boxing fans across the world, that particular day is celebrated for what happened in 1985, when Marvelous Marvin Hagler and Thomas Hearns staged their memorable three-round war at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

It has been dubbed "Eight Minutes of Fury," a fight so ferocious that it is probably a good thing that it didn't last any longer. It was Hagler who came out victorious, but Hearns' stature wasn't damaged all that much in defeat.

This was the kind of sporting event for which everyone remembers where they were when it took place. For me, as a 13-year-old in Valencia, California, I was at batting practice on that Monday evening (yes, big fights in that era took place on weekdays and relied on closed-circuit theater viewing). The William S. Hart Pony League was a serious one: If you played on a team, going to practice was mandatory – even when it took place at the batting cages.

I distinctly recall getting an update on the fight from a parent who had gone out to his car to listen on the radio. I remember the particular thrill I got a few days later when I pulled the Sports Illustrated out of my mailbox: Hagler hitting Hearns while up along the ropes, with "MARVELOUS!" written boldly across the cover. It wasn't until a few weeks later that I got to actually see the full fight as it was eventually replayed on one of the networks.



"The Fight" was easy to make, according to its promoter, Bob Arum.

But it's one thing to have memories of when that legendary bout took place; there are those who were fortunate to have been there in person. Not to get morbid, but as the years go on, the number of those who witnessed it live is dwindling. The perspectives of those who played various roles surrounding Hagler-Hearns are more valued than ever.

There is Bob Arum, now 93, who promoted this battle between two iconic boxers he had close associations with. He recalls that making the fight "was very easy. I had great relationships with Emanuel (Steward, Hearns' trainer) and even better with the Petronellis (Goody and Pat, Hagler's trainer and co-managers) and Hagler. It was very easy to negotiate."

Arum believes that the heated nature of this fight began as he took the fighters on a media tour that went to over 20 cities in two weeks to promote what was simply billed as "The Fight."

"That's when it went off the rails a little bit, because Tommy got under Marvin's skin and they almost had a big fight in St. Louis," recalled the veteran promoter. "So when the fight happened, these guys didn't want to box or anything; they just wanted to tear each other's heads off."

Which is precisely what happened as Hagler came out blazing and Hearns, immediately under attack from "The Marvelous One," had no choice but to enact his own style of violent self-defense. Many pundits have labeled this the greatest first round in big-fight history.

It never fails, right around this time of year: Arum will do myriad interviews about the fight. But he never gets Hagler-Hearns fatigue. "No, because as a matter of fact, remembering it is a pleasant experience," he stated.

Then you have Larry Merchant, who perhaps had the best seat to witness the sanctioned violence. He was part of the broadcast crew that called the action for HBO Sports.

In his view, the fight irrevocably changed in one particular moment.

"... when the fight happened, these guys didn't want to box or anything; they just wanted to tear each other's heads off."

A 20-city press tour stoked the Hagler-Hearns rivalry.

Merchant recalled: "Hearns hit Hagler with a wicked shot, and Hagler just shook it off and kept coming forward. I remember saying something like 'this fight is over,' because of that punch he was able to shake off."

Most great fights are longer in length, but the 94-year-old Merchant pointed out, "It was only three rounds, so it's easy to remember everything. But it's one of those fights that a generation of boxing fans and sports fans were moved by the sincerity of what Hagler was doing."

Then there's Doug Krikorian, who covered many of the era's big bouts as a newspaper man of note in Los Angeles for over four decades. For Krikorian, this night on press row was both memorable and costly.

"Hagler-Hearns for three rounds would rank among the very best, but it didn't last very long," said the 81-year-old Krikorian, who was at most of the superfights in the '80s, seeing Hagler and Hearns as well as the other members of the "Four Kings," Sugar Ray Leonard and Roberto Duran. In his view, the best fight involving these legends was the initial battle between Leonard and Hearns in 1981. "But for three rounds, [Hagler-Hearns] was the greatest fight I ever saw."

Coming into the contest, Krikorian felt that for as good as Hagler was, he could be outboxed. He also believed Hearns had the boxing acumen to outpoint Hagler over 12 rounds. With that, he put a $13,000 wager on Hearns. (Seriously, what was the Los Angeles Herald Examiner paying back then?)

Despite the furious onslaught from Hearns in the first 90 seconds of the fight, it was evident when the bell sounded to end that memorable opening stanza that Hagler had weathered the storm. This fight was only headed in one direction. At that point, Allan Malamud – another newspaper columnist of note from L.A. – turned to Krikorian and told him, "You're going to lose your bet."

All Krikorian could say was, "I know." But there are no hard feelings from him, just admiration. "Marvin Hagler was a great fighter and a great guy."

Forty years have now passed since that special night. It won't ever be forgotten. RING

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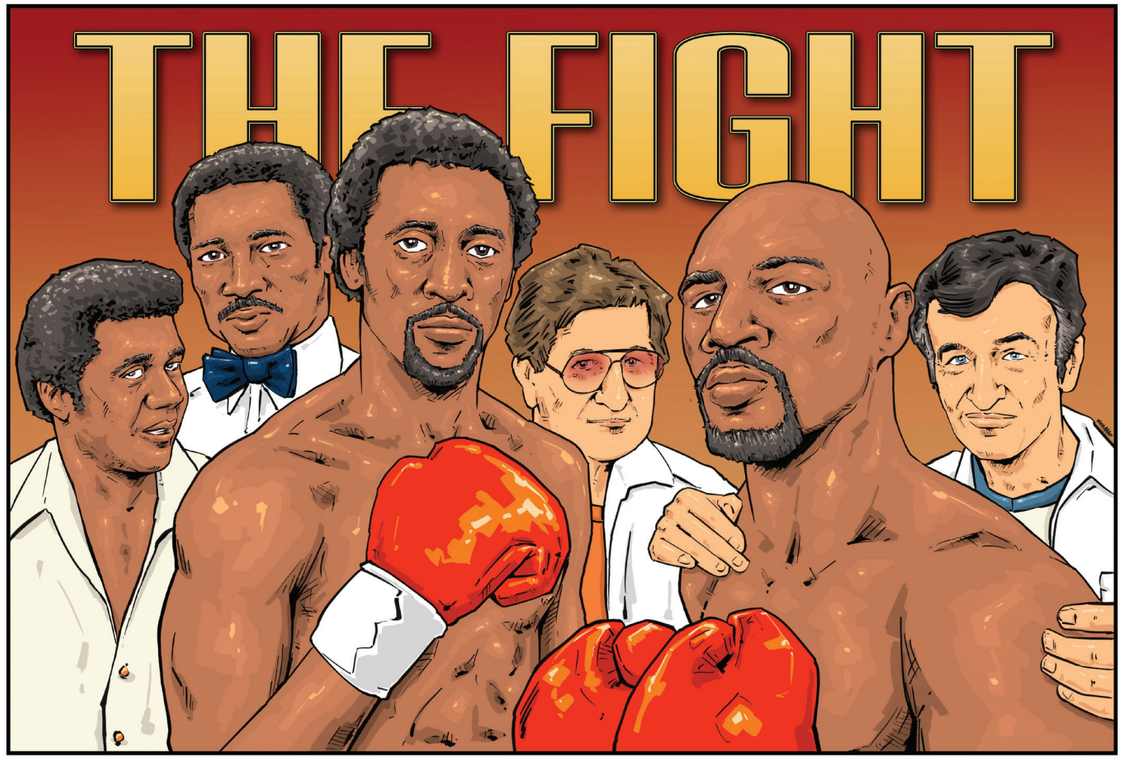
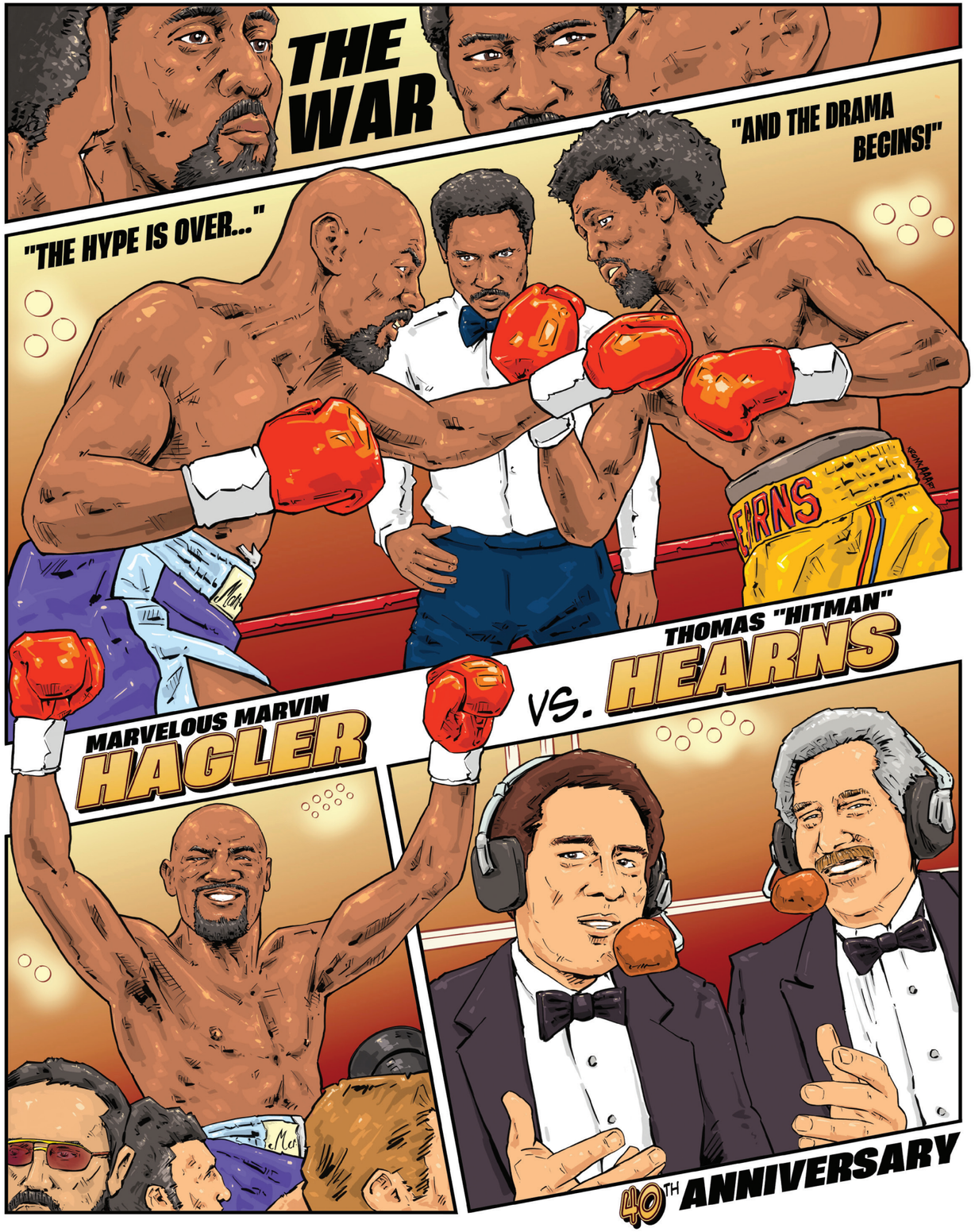


Forty Years Ago, The Nobility Of Boxing Was Reconfirmed On A Perfect Night Under The Stars In Las Vegas

By Al Bernstein • Illustrations by KronkAAArt

On Monday, April 15, 1985, Marvelous Marvin Hagler and Thomas Hearns indelibly stamped their names in the history books with one of the most action-packed and dramatic fights in history. Held on the day when Americans pay their income taxes, both of these men paid a heavy toll in the ring during eight hellacious minutes of warfare. Leading up to the fight, Hagler wore a hat that simply said "WAR" on it, and that is what he and Hearns delivered that night. Hagler got the win, but you can say without fear of contradiction that Hearns was no loser. Neither was the sport of boxing.

I was only five years into my television career when I got the dream assignment of being the analyst on this closed-circuit telecast. I was literally starstruck as I sat in the production meeting for the show alongside Curt Gowdy (who would host) and Al Michaels (who would sit ringside and announce the fight with me). I could barely believe



Few fighters who have ever stepped into a ring have had the toughness, dogged determination and will to win that Marvin Hagler had.

I was in such august company. I had announced Hagler's middleweight title defense against Roberto Duran in 1983, but this championship fight seemed to occupy an even bigger place in the sports universe. It's fitting that it came almost exactly at the midpoint of the 1980s, perhaps the best decade boxing has ever experienced. It seemed to validate the greatness that we thought we were seeing in the first half of the decade, and it was foreshadowing many great fights still to come in that 10-year period.

Several days before the fight, I was interviewing Hagler for the telecast, which was done inside a ring. As Marvin and I were walking up the steps, I inadvertently stepped on the back of his heel and we both lost our balance and had to hang on for dear life so we didn't fall off the stairs. While this was happening (and nervous folks were running to help us), all I could think of was that I could ruin the biggest middleweight fight in many years – and my career as well – in one blink of an eye. Luckily, we did not go down in a heap and he did not get injured. With his usual sardonic sense of humor, Marvin looked at me after this incident and said, "Did Tommy put you up to that?" We both laughed, but under my laugh was a giant sigh of relief.

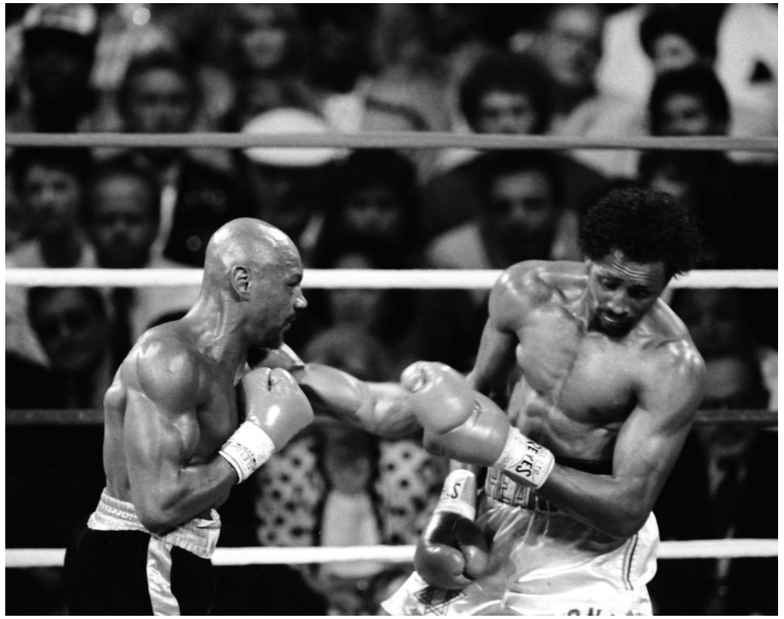
Back in those days, you couldn't reach the world in one livestreamed press conference as you do now. You had to do it the old-fashioned way, with a press tour. For those of you under 30, please google that phrase. This fight had one of the longest and most extensive press tours of any big fight of the era. Both Hagler and Hearns had to be around each other constantly in city after city and repeat their predictions of victory and any thoughts about their opponent over and over again in close proximity to each other. Even though both men always had respect for each other, this process made them testy and more than a little annoyed with their opponent. It all helped add extra tension heading into the match. Later, Hagler famously said, "I was just so sick of seeing Tommy that I wanted to rip his head off." And we are all pretty sure that Tommy Hearns felt the same way.

It was a beautiful spring evening in the desert the night of the fight. The outdoor venue in the Caesars Palace parking lot was filled with spectators who actually seemed a little subdued to me in the minutes leading up to the fight – even during the walk-ins of the fighters. I realized later it was hardly indifference; it was tension – a kind of anticipation that made people less vocal and more focused on their thoughts of what was to come. After all, everyone in the boxing world, pundit or fan, expected excitement in the fight.

What we all expected and what we got were two different things. Not even the most optimistic of observers could have anticipated that we were all about to witness one of the greatest rounds of boxing ever fought. One book written about this fight devoted an entire chapter to the first round alone. That round was frenetic, exciting, brutal and also skillful. It began with Hagler, normally not a super-quick starter, pressing the pace. In the process, however, he walked into one of Hearns' signature monstrous right hands. This produced the first of several fascinating subplots of the fight. The punch stunned Hagler. Even though in my post-fight interview he said the punch didn't really hurt him, years later he admitted in a private moment with me that it did stun him – though he was never in danger of going down. This, however, was not the important subplot. This was: We learned after the fight that with that punch, Hearns had broken his right hand – something he shared with trainer Emanuel Steward after the round, but it was undetected by the mic in the corner. So, only seconds into this major fight, Hearns had proven his power could affect the iron-chinned Hagler, but he lost one of the weapons necessary to do it.

Remarkably, with a damaged right hand, Hearns was still able to throw the punch and land it enough to conceal the weakness. In fact, CompuBox numbers show he threw 83 punches in the first round and landed 56 (67% of his punches). Hagler was not far behind with 50 punches landed of 82 thrown (a 61% connect rate). When a boxer gets anywhere near 50% in total punches landed, it is considered a great performance, so these numbers were off the chart. In addition, the two combined to land 95 power shots (defined as everything other than jabs) in the round. That STILL remains the record for a single round in a middleweight fight. I am not given to hyperbole when I announce fights, so words like "best" and "greatest" are not used much by me. At the end of this round, I was moved to call it "perhaps one of the best in middleweight history." Honestly, it just spilled out of my mouth with no forethought. I literally could not help but say it. The crowd that had seemed subdued only minutes before was now as frenzied and loud as any I've ever heard.

Here is where we get into fact vs. perception. Most folks (including me) have at some point had the perception that once that first round was over, Tommy was not that competitive in the rest of the fight. This narrative is also fueled by the information we later got about the broken right hand. But that



Hagler cemented his status as an all-time great middleweight champion on April 15, 1985.

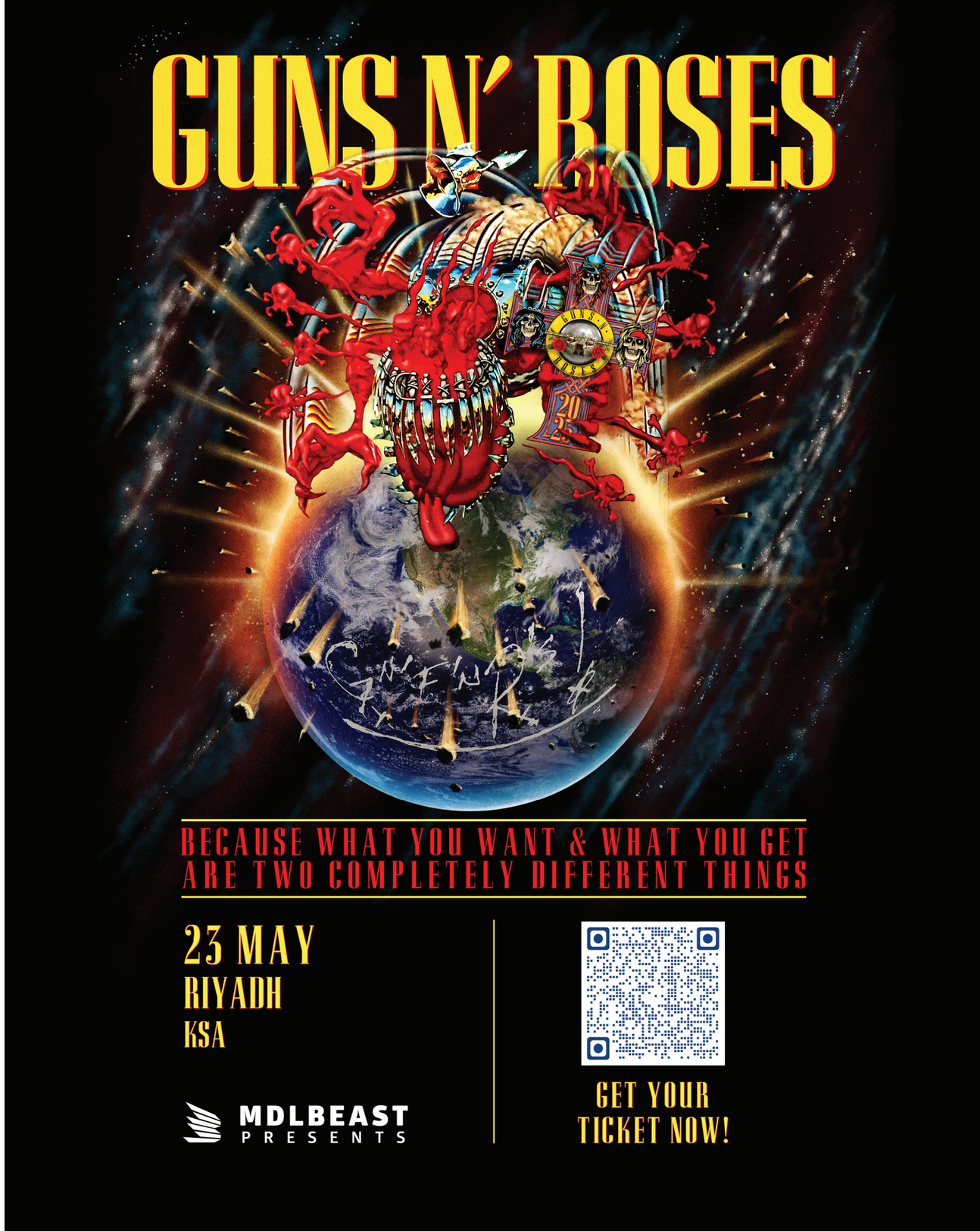
perception is not true. In Round 2, Hearns, relying mostly on jabs and left hooks, was still having a lot of good moments offensively. He landed 26 of 61 punches (43%) in the round. Hagler landed 32 of 63 (51%) and certainly in terms of hard shots, he probably had the edge, but Hearns was still giving Hagler plenty to think about, and it was a very entertaining round. The problem is that nothing short of Armageddon would have equaled the first round. It was, however, becoming apparent that Hearns might have to try to win this fight the way he almost did in his first bout with Sugar Ray Leonard – move and box while landing jabs and occasional power shots. We pointed this out on the telecast, but we had to add that it was apparent that the process of doing it was labored because his legs were not responding as they did in the Leonard match and others. His underpinnings seemed less than sturdy. That brings us to the second subplot. We also learned days after the fight that two of Steward's aides had given Hearns a leg massage in the dressing room just before the fight. Emanuel was tending to something outside the dressing room when it happened; he didn't see it. When he learned of it, he was livid. He attributed the weakened condition of Hearns' legs in the fight to this.

Shortly into Round 3, a new subplot emerged when a cut that had started on Hagler's forehead in the first round burst open and blood was everywhere. Referee Richard Steele stopped the action to have the doctor look at it. Hagler said to Steele, "Nobody's stopping this fight from a cut." Steele said that he had to seek medical advice on this. After the doctor's inspection, which only lasted about three seconds, the fight would go on, but Hagler knew there was still the danger of another intervention and determined that he had to stop Hearns before that happened. He put everything into overdrive and overwhelmed an already very tired Hearns. Hagler put him down, and moments later the best eight-minute-long fight in history was over. I've watched the fight about 20 times since then and often wondered if it could have been different if Hearns had not injured his right hand so early. And what of the leg massage? Was it a factor? I don't know the answer, but it was clear Hearns was not able to move as well as he had done in other fights. As I have wondered all this, I have also considered something else very important: Few fighters who have ever stepped into a ring have had the toughness, dogged determination and will to win that Marvin Hagler had. So it is not hard to conclude that no matter what else happened, Hagler was simply not going to allow himself to lose this fight. He said as much after the win.

Even in this social media-driven boxing universe where everything is subject to some kind of edgy or often mean-spirited hot take, I refuse to believe that any boxing fan doesn't have respect and admiration for what Marvin Hagler and Tommy Hearns produced 40 years ago. There is simply no glass-half-empty way to look at this fight. Even Hearns, who suffered such huge disappointment in this match, speaks of it glowingly and calls it an honor to have been in this match. And before Marvin Hagler left this earth much too soon, he was almost reverential in the way he talked about that experience and Tommy's role in making it special. This match lives forever on YouTube, where generations of boxing fans relive or perhaps discover for the first time the greatness that transpired on that special night.

I will leave it to my friend, the late, great Garry Shandling, to put this in perspective as only he could. He told me once at lunch about his Hagler-Hearns experience. He was the opening act for Joan Rivers at Caesars Palace that night. So he had to be onstage at a certain time. He was at ringside watching the fight and also nervously eyeing his watch. He said to me, "I only had time for a three-round fight, so it was perfect." Perfect. Yes, at the end of the day, that describes what happened in Las Vegas 40 years ago. RING

Sarah Stier

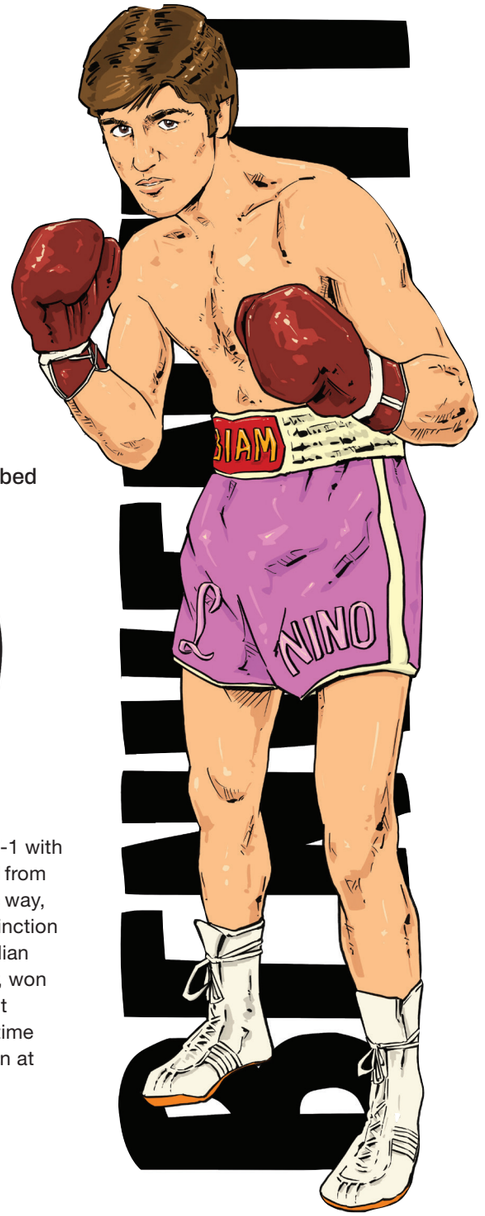


BY THE NUMBERS:

Nino Benvenuti

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAArt

He's turning 87 in April, making Giovanni "Nino" Benvenuti one of the oldest living former boxing champions. Known for his shaggy hair and stylish wardrobe, Benvenuti attracted a devoted following in Italy and was also beloved by New York's Italian-American fans. A classy stand-up boxer, he could fight dirty when needed. He could also flash a sudden left hook that put many opponents on their backs. Open about his friendships with gamblers, his love of Ernest Hemingway and his admiration for Benito Mussolini, Benvenuti was always good copy. Because of his taste for books and classical music, his admirers playfully dubbed him "The Intellectual." Here's his story by the numbers.



1 Gold Medal »

Though the 1960 Rome Olympics are remembered for introducing Muhammad Ali to the world, it was Benvenuti who dominated the news in Italy that year. He won the finals at welterweight by defeating the Soviet Union's Yuri Radonyak on points. Along with his gold medal, Benvenuti claimed the Val Barker trophy as the games' outstanding boxer. With two other gold medals, three silvers and a bronze, Italy was far in front of Poland, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. as the best boxing team of 1960. This kicked off a heyday for Italian boxing that lasted into the 1970s, a golden era of which Benvenuti was the face.

90 fights »

His pro record was 82-7-1 with 35 knockouts, compiled from 1961 to 1971. Along the way, he claimed regional distinction as the European and Italian middleweight titleholder, won world titles in two weight classes and was a two-time Ring Magazine champion at 160 pounds.

65 consecutive wins »

Benvenuti owned one of the longest unbeaten streaks in boxing history, achieved before his 28th birthday. Though he fought almost exclusively in Italy, and one suspects the home turf played to his advantage, it was an impressive feat. During that 65-fight run, Benvenuti defeated some fine opponents, including Denny Moyer, Gaspar Ortega, Don Fullmer, and the man from whom he won the WBC junior middleweight title, Italy's tough Sandro Mazzinghi. Benvenuti's winning streak ended when he ventured to South Korea and lost the junior middleweight title to Ki Soo Kim on a split decision. Kim later lost the title to Benvenuti's old rival, Mazzinghi.

3 bouts with Emile Griffith »

Benvenuti made a spectacular U.S. debut, arriving in New York in May 1967 to win the Ring, WBA and WBC middleweight titles from Griffith at Madison Square Garden. Benvenuti was Italy's first world middleweight champion and was so impressive in winning a 15-round decision that he drew accolades as perhaps the best European fighter to ever invade America. Among his most passionate rooters was retired heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano, who praised Benvenuti's performance. "Looking at him work," said Marciano, "you can't say 'he fights like a European.' The only thing you can say about Nino is, 'He fights like a champion.'"

Nino's impact on America's boxing scene was profound, and not only for the street vendors who made a fortune selling little Italian flags before his fights. Sports Illustrated put Nino on the cover, while The Ring chose Benvenuti-Griffith 1 as Fight of the Year. Garden matchmaker Teddy Brenner said in 1967 that Benvenuti "had done more for boxing" than Ali. At the time, this seemed true. With his elegant style in the ring and enough boyish charm to make his female fans howl, it seemed Benvenuti had brought something special to boxing, a romanticism it had lacked for some time. As one syndicated columnist put it, "Madison Square Garden, the night Nino Benvenuti won the middleweight championship of the world, was the way boxing was meant to be."

Griffith regained the laurels in a rematch at Shea Stadium in September of 1967, defeating Benvenuti by 15-round majority decision. In the rubber match at the Garden, Benvenuti overcame Griffith's late rally and took the championship back in March of 1968. Though it was a unanimous 15-round decision for Benvenuti, the third bout was the most difficult of the trilogy to score.

5 wins by disqualification »

Italian referees were quick to throw fighters out for any rule infraction. Sometimes it was a cultural clash. Benvenuti suggested as much after Fraser Scott was disqualified for butting in their 1969 fight in Naples. "I realize that Scott would never have been disqualified in the U.S. His is the American way of boxing," Benvenuti said. Many felt the DQ of Scott was wrong and were critical of referee Tony Gillardi's fervent approach to the rules. "The result was a black eye for Italian boxing," reported the United Press, "often accused of being unable to maintain high or impartial standards of officiating." (Nino wasn't alone in benefiting from overzealous Italian referees. Italy's Bruno Arcari won six times by DQ.)

3 film roles »

Perhaps it was inevitable that the dashing Benvenuti would try acting. In 1969, he landed a lead role in a comedy set in the old American West. Unfortunately, the spaghetti Western era wouldn't do for Nino what it had done for Clint Eastwood. Released in some countries as *Alive or Preferably Dead*, the film flopped.

Certain members of the American press mocked Nino's interest in movies. This started when the boxer caused a bout's postponement due to an illness, only to be discovered at the film studio in Rome. The debonair champ was filming interior shots while he was supposed to be out sick. With Benvenuti's new film career coinciding with a noticeable decline in his ring work, sportswriters grew cynical about "Benvenuti mania." New York columnist Red Smith was among the most scornful. After Benvenuti lost a non-title fight against Dick Tiger, Smith described the Italian icon as "girlish," fighting "like a movie star." Smith even scrutinized Benvenuti's "pale caramel" skin tone: "It looked like a tan acquired under klieg lights."

Though Benvenuti talked about doing more acting after he left boxing, he appeared in only two more films, a 1975 crime drama called Mark il Poliziotto Spara per Primo (which was translated as *Mark Shoots First*), and a 2008 Italian-Romanian biopic of Primo Carnera, in which Benvenuti appeared briefly as a trainer.

1 Fighter of the Year award »

Regaining the middleweight title was part of a superb 1968 campaign for Nino. He went 6-0-1, earning top honors from The Ring as Fighter of the Year.

2 losses to Carlos Monzon »

With a brutal 12th-round KO, Argentina's Monzon ended Benvenuti's second reign as middleweight champion in 1970. After losing the rematch by a TKO in the third, Benvenuti retired from boxing and looked to the future. After all, he'd invested his money wisely and was a certified Italian sports idol. In the following years, he'd stay busy by being with his family, hosting a television talk show and looking after his many properties. These included an aluminum factory in Bologna and a high-end restaurant in his hometown of Trieste, where he'd also served on the city council. One assumes he also had more time for his love of books. "Literature is the teacher of life," Benvenuti once said. And preferable, we're certain, to getting punched in the head by Monzon. RING

Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of March 8, 2025 • By Brian Harty

Dmitry Bivol (left) and Artur Beterbiev switched pound-for-pound spots after Bivol's victory in their rematch.

Maud SAKRI

POUND FOR POUND: The rematch between Artur Beterbiev and Dmitry Bivol was good, as expected, but let's just take a few seconds to recognize another name: Alan Masferrer. If you haven't seen the trailer he directed for "The Last Crescendo," go hook yourself into the other renaissance happening in boxing – the one where creative people are getting free reign to torch the crusty *24/7* model of "drama" in favor of something more innovative, more entertaining and even abstract. Most of the high-concept previews for the Riyadh Season shows have been good (even fun, heaven forbid), but this one pushed it to a new place – and while the level of surrealism probably didn't click with everyone, it's great to see the sport getting respect as a place where artists can take chances to do something we've never seen before. Boxing sometimes has a problem with that.

Back to the fight: Like the first encounter, Beterbiev-Bivol 2 was another high-IQ battle between two elite light heavyweights and another close bout that went the distance, but this time Bivol got the majority decision and the undisputed championship that came with it. The result on the P4P list was straightforward: Beterbiev went down a notch to No. 5, Bivol went up a spot to No. 4.

Junto Nakatani rose from No. 9 to No. 8 after knocking out David Cuellar in the third round. The move took him one step closer to Naoya Inoue (No. 2) in the hypothetical rankings, a trend that mirrors the real-world fantasies of fight fans as the two countrymen spiral toward a potential matchup.

And then there was Tank. In a bizarre ninth round against Lamont Roach Jr. – a fight that was arguably tilting in Roach's direction – Gervonta Davis suddenly dropped to a knee and effectively called "time out" while he went to his corner to get his face wiped off. Referee Steve Willis, perhaps as confused as everyone else watching, didn't call a knockdown, which is what happens in roughly 100% of other cases when a fighter voluntarily takes a knee. Accusations of favoritism were hurled, as a knockdown could've meant a win for Roach. Has Davis gotten too comfortable as a star? Does he believe that being the A-side means that he can D-cide the rules mid-fight? Suffice to say the post-fight social media chatter wasn't kind.

Regardless of the controversy, the ratings panel argued over whether Davis (No. 8 on the list) had upheld his pound-for-pound credentials in fighting on even (and to some, losing) terms with a skilled but light-fisted titleholder from a lower division. The pro-"keep" side pointed to the names on his strong resume and said he had an off night; the pro-"drop" panelists pointed to the same resume and said names, yes, but not *that* strong, and added that "off" can be swapped for "revealing" in such a crowded pound-for-pound landscape. It was eventually decided that Davis would drop out, and David Benavidez was voted into the vacancy at No. 10.

HEAVYWEIGHT: Joseph Parker held his position at No. 3 after the dust from The Last Crescendo had settled, but all the other heavyweights who fought that night experienced movement. Martin Bakole, who replaced an ailing Daniel Dubois two days before he was supposed to face Parker, was knocked out in the second round after getting clipped on the dome by a right hand from the Kiwi. The late sub from the Congo dropped from No. 6 to No. 7 and went home with a nice paycheck. Agit "Voodoo Child" Kabayel, ranked No. 5 when the sun rose on the morning of the event, finished the night at No. 4 after chopping down a mountain named Zhilei Zhang with the edge of his hand. Kabayel was floored himself in the fifth round, but the steady investment he'd made in body shots paid off in the sixth, when an exhausted Zhang took one final punch to the gut and went down for the count. He slipped from No. 4 to No. 6 on the list.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: As with the pound-for-pound list, Beterbiev (division champ going in) and Bivol (No. 1 contender) switched places in the 175-pound ratings.

For many, the fight of the night in Riyadh was the bomb-laden battle between No. 6-rated Callum Smith and No. 3-rated Joshua Buatsi – two countrymen who went at it with knockout intentions from the first round yet somehow went all 12, at the end of which Smith won a unanimous decision that was marred by a ridiculously wide scorecard of 119-110 from judge Steve Gray. It was a thoughtful brawl, adjustments made on both sides throughout but edged by Smith's use of combinations that often made audible use of a walloping body shot, and it was ultimately a fight in which individual spite seemed to give way to two bleeding warriors just wolfishly grinning as they mutually enjoyed the thrill of combat. It was a career-rejuvenating performance for Smith, who was deflated and mulling retirement after a stoppage loss to Beterbiev in January 2024. In the ratings, he rose to No. 3 while Buatsi sank to No. 5.

MIDDLEWEIGHT: Carlos Adames capped Hamzah Sheeraz's KO streak at 15 and edged out the win in most observers' eyes, but some wildly erratic scorecards resulted in a split draw. In recognition of majority reality, Adames went from No. 3 to No. 2 and Sheeraz did the opposite.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Both were undefeated in the boxing ring and in the grammatical arena of alliteration, but somebody's "0" had to go as Xander Zayas and Slawa Spomer teed off on the undercard of Denys Berinchyk-Keyshawn Davis in New York City. It steadily turned into a rout as the long-armed Zayas time and again showcased his fondness for liver punches (and some a bit lower), but the game Spomer never broke under the pressure and finished on his feet when referee Charlie Fitch finally intervened in the ninth round. It was a solid win over a second-tier player at 154, good enough for Zayas to replace Brian Mendoza at No. 10 on the list.

In another fight that proved the time-honored importance of body punching, Vergil Ortiz Jr. overcame a strong start from Israil Madrimov and gradually sapped the Uzbek's strength with torso blows en route to earning a unanimous decision victory. The still-undefeated Ortiz went from No. 5 to No. 2, knocking Madrimov down a notch to No. 3.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: No. 2-rated Jack Catterall came out on the "L" end of a split decision against the unbeaten Arnold Barboza (No. 9 going in), with Barboza's greater activity in the final rounds clinching the razor-thin upset. Catterall dropped to No. 5 and Barboza jumped up to No. 4 as a result.

March 1 was an active day at 140, with Gary Antuanne Russell (unrated) winning a unanimous decision over Jose Valenzuela (No. 10) and Alberto Puello (No. 2) notching a toss-up split decision over Sandor Martin (unrated) – both on the Davis-Roach undercard – while Subriel Matias (No. 7) pleased his hometown fans in Puerto Rico with an eighth-round stoppage of Gabriel Valenzuela (unrated). Matias stayed put; Russell and his new WBA title moved in at No. 8 as Valenzuela dropped out; Martin came in at No. 9, and the strength of his performance was further recognized by moving Puello down to No. 4. All the movement also ousted No. 9-rated Andy Hiraoka from the ratings.

LIGHTWEIGHT: Context is everything, and in a fight against the calm, always-balanced Keyshawn Davis, Denis Berinchyk's jumpy, zig-zag-and-crash style, which had been his ticket to winning all 19 of his pro contests and a WBO title, made him seem like a starving scavenger looking to steal a scrap before the trap snapped shut. And his luck ran out fairly quickly, as Davis chomped him with a left hook to – you guessed it – the body for a knockdown in Round 3, then did it again for the knockout in the fourth. Berinchyk handed over his belt and slipped from No. 6 to No. 9 after the loss, while Davis (No. 5 going into the fight) jumped over close friend Shakur Stevenson to crack the top three.

There were some on the panel who suggested lowering Gervonta Davis from No. 1 to below Vasiliy Lomachenko, despite the Ukrainian's inactivity, but Tank retained his position at the top. Roach's future at 135 is unclear and he still holds a belt at 130, so he remained unrated for the time being. Those in favor of including him proposed No. 5.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: Eduardo Hernandez rose from No. 9 to No. 8 after a near-shutout victory over fellow Mexican Rene Tellez Giron, marking his third straight win since a final-round stoppage loss to then-titleholder O'Shaquie Foster in late 2023.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: Luis Nery was promoted from No. 4 to No. 3 after having his way for six rounds against Kyosuke Kameda (unrated), then flooring the Japanese fighter twice and stopping him in the seventh.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Nakatani, undefeated and already rated No. 1, sent Cuellar flying backward with a straight left to the solar plexus followed by another to the head for a knockdown in Round 3, then immediately followed up with a crushing left for a second knockdown and the 10-count. Cuellar, who went into the fight rated No. 8, dropped out of the ratings.

On that same card, WBA titleholder Seiya Tsutsumi held on to his belt with a draw – 114-114 across the board – in a fight whose ninth frame could be an early candidate for round of the year: Higa floored Tsutsumi with a counter left hook, which fueled a 30-second follow-up attack, and then Higa did a face-plant after Tsutsumi nailed him with a right cross. The rest of the round was Higa weathering an assault from a bleeding Tsutsumi until the bell. These guys are true nemeses, having also fought to a draw in November 2020 (though one judge favored Higa by one point in that bout). Tsutsumi stayed put at No. 3 while Higa, a former flyweight titleholder, was lifted from No. 9 to No. 7.

Picking up the slack left by Cuellar's exit was popular kickboxer-turned-kickless boxer Tenshin Nasukawa, who cracked the ratings at No. 8 with a unanimous decision over former titleholder Jason Moloney, who slipped from No. 7 to No. 9.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: David Jimenez went from No. 9 to No. 8 after a respectable UD over Keyvin Lara. The move was also informed by the downward trajectory of ultimate underdog and former champion Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (formerly No. 8), who, after his knockout loss to Jesse Rodriguez in 2022, seems to be enjoying a working retirement fighting low-risk six- and eight-rounders.

FLYWEIGHT: Creeping dark horse Ricardo Sandoval got a one-rank promotion to No. 5 and surely gained some more ground toward a title shot by widely outpointing Saleto Henderson (unrated) in Anaheim, California.

STRAWWEIGHT: Former titleholder Wilfredo Mendez moved up in weight, so he was removed from the list and the Philippines' Joey Canoy returned at No. 10.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1	**OLEKSANDR USYK**	Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
2	**NAOYA INOUE**	Japan • 29-0-0 (26 KOs)
3	**TERENCE CRAWFORD**	U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
4	**DMITRY BIVOL**	Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
5	**ARTUR BETERBIEV**	Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
6	**JESSE RODRIGUEZ**	U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
7	**CANELO ALVAREZ**	Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
8	**JUNTO NAKATANI**	Japan • 30-0-0 (23 KOs)
9	**DEVIN HANEY**	U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
10	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ**	U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	**OLEKSANDR USYK** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO	Ukraine • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)
1	**TYSON FURY**	U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
2	**DANIEL DUBOIS** IBF	U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
3	**JOSEPH PARKER**	New Zealand • 36-3-0 (24 KOs)
4	**AGIT KABAYEL**	Germany • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
5	**ANTHONY JOSHUA**	U.K. • 28-4-0 (25 KOs)
6	**ZHILEI ZHANG**	China • 27-3-1 (22 KOs)
7	**MARTIN BAKOLE**	Congo • 21-2-0 (16 KOs)
8	**FILIP HRGOVIC**	Croatia • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)
9	**FABIO WARDLEY**	U.K. • 18-0-1 (17 KOs)
10	**EFE AJAGBA**	Nigeria • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	**JAI OPETAIA** RING, IBF	Australia • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
1	**GILBERTO RAMIREZ** WBA, WBO	Mexico • 47-1-0 (30 KOs)
2	**CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH**	U.K. • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
3	**ALEKSEI PAPIN**	Russia • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
4	**RICHARD RIAKPORHE**	U.K. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
5	**ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN**	France • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
6	**MICHAL CIESLAK**	Poland • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
7	**RYAN ROZICKI**	Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
8	**YAMIL PERALTA**	Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
9	**BRANDON GLANTON**	U.S. • 20-2-0 (17 KOs)
10	**LEONARDO MOSQUEA**	France • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	**DMITRY BIVOL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO	Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
1	**ARTUR BETERBIEV**	Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
2	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ**	U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
3	**CALLUM SMITH**	U.K. • 31-2-0 (22 KOs)
4	**ANTHONY YARDE**	U.K. • 26-3-0 (24 KOs)
5	**JOSHUA BUATSI**	U.K. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
6	**ALBERT RAMIREZ**	Venezuela • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
7	**OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**	Ukraine • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
8	**DAVID MORRELL**	Cuba • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
9	**WILLY HUTCHINSON**	U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)
10	**IMAM KHATAEV**	Russia • 9-0-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	**CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO	Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
1	**CHRISTIAN MBILLI**	France • 28-0-0 (23 KOs)
2	**DIEGO PACHECO**	U.S. • 23-0-0 (18 KOs)
3	**OSLEYS IGLESIAS**	Cuba • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
4	**CALEB PLANT**	U.S. • 23-2-0 (14 KOs)
5	**WILLIAM SCULL** IBF	Cuba • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
6	**VLADIMIR SHISHKIN**	Russia • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
7	**BRUNO SURACE**	France • 26-0-2 (5 KOs)
8	**JAIME MUNGUIA**	Mexico • 44-2-0 (35 KOs)
9	**EDGAR BERLANGA**	U.S. • 22-1-0 (17 KOs)
10	**ERIK BAZINYAN**	Canada • 32-1-1 (23 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY** IBF, WBO	Kazakhstan • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
2	**CARLOS ADAMES** WBC	Dom. Rep. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
3	**HAMZAH SHEERAZ**	U.K. • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
4	**ERISLANDY LARA** WBA	Cuba • 31-3-3 (19 KOs)
5	**CHRIS EUBANK JR.**	U.K. • 34-3-0 (25 KOs)
6	**ETINOSA OLIHA**	Italy • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)
7	**KYRONE DAVIS**	U.S. • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)
8	**TROY ISLEY**	U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
9	**SHANE MOSLEY JR.**	U.S. • 22-4-0 (12 KOs)
10	**DENZEL BENTLEY**	U.K. • 21-3-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBA	U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
2	**VERGIL ORTIZ**	U.S. • 23-0-0 (21 KOs)
3	**ISRAIL MADRIMOV**	Uzbekistan • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)
4	**BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV** IBF	Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
5	**SEBASTIAN FUNDORA** WBC, WBO	U.S. • 21-1-1 (13 KOs)
6	**SERHII BOHACHUK**	Ukraine • 25-2-0 (24 KOs)
7	**TIM TSZYU**	Australia • 24-2-0 (17 KOs)
8	**CHARLES CONWELL**	U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
9	**JESUS RAMOS**	U.S. • 22-1-0 (18 KOs)
10	**XANDER ZAYAS**	Puerto Rico • 21-0-0 (13 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**JARON ENNIS** IBF	U.S. • 33-0-0 (29 KOs)
2	**EIMANTAS STANIONIS** WBA	Lithuania • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)
3	**MARIO BARRIOS** WBC	U.S. • 29-2-1 (18 KOs)
4	**DAVID AVANESYAN**	Russia • 31-5-1 (19 KOs)
5	**BRIAN NORMAN JR.** WBO	U.S. • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
6	**GIOVANI SANTILLAN**	U.S. • 33-1-0 (18 KOs)
7	**SHAKHRAM GIYASOV**	Uzbekistan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
8	**JIN SASAKI**	Japan • 19-1-1 (17 KOs)
9	**ALEXIS ROCHA**	U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
10	**RAUL CURIEL**	Mexico • 15-0-1 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C	**TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBO	U.S. • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)
1	**DEVIN HANEY**	U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
2	**RICHARDSON HITCHINS** IBF	U.S. • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
3	**ARNOLD BARBOZA**	U.S. • 32-0-0 (11 KOs)
4	**ALBERTO PUELLO** WBC	Dom. Rep. • 24-0-0 (10 KOs)
5	**JACK CATTERALL**	U.K. • 30-2-0 (13 KOs)
6	**LIAM PARO**	Australia • 25-1-0 (15 KOs)
7	**SUBRIEL MATIAS**	Puerto Rico • 22-2-0 (22 KOs)
8	**GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL** WBA	U.S. • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
9	**SANDOR MARTIN**	Spain • 42-4-0 (15 KOs)
10	**JOSH TAYLOR**	U.K. • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)

Mark Robinson

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA	U.S. • 30-0-1 (28 KOs)
2	**VASILIY LOMACHENKO** IBF	Ukraine • 18-3-0 (12 KOs)
3	**KEYSHAWN DAVIS** WBO	U.S. • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
4	**SHAKUR STEVENSON** WBC	U.S. • 23-0-0 (11 KOs)
5	**WILLIAM ZEPEDA**	Mexico • 32-0-0 (27 KOs)
6	**RAYMOND MURATALLA**	U.S. • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
7	**ANDY CRUZ**	Cuba • 5-0-0 (2 KOs)
8	**FRANK MARTIN**	U.S. • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
9	**DENYS BERINCHYK**	Ukraine • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
10	**TEVIN FARMER**	U.S. • 33-7-1 (8 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO	Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)
2	**O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** WBC	U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
3	**ANTHONY CACACE** IBF	Ireland • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
4	**LAMONT ROACH** WBA	U.S. • 25-1-2 (10 KOs)
5	**JOE CORDINA**	U.K. • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
6	**ROBSON CONCEICAO**	Brazil • 19-3-1 (9 KOs)
7	**EDUARDO NUNEZ**	Mexico • 27-1-0 (27 KOs)
8	**EDUARDO HERNANDEZ**	Mexico • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
9	**ALBERT BATYRGAZIEV**	Russia • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)
10	**ALBERT BELL**	U.S. • 26-0-0 (9 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**ANGELO LEO** IBF	U.S. • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)
2	**RAFAEL ESPINOZA** WBO	Mexico • 26-0-0 (22 KOs)
3	**NICK BALL** WBA	U.K. • 21-0-1 (12 KOs)
4	**STEPHEN FULTON** WBC	U.S. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
5	**REY VARGAS**	Mexico • 36-1-1 (22 KOs)
6	**LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ**	Mexico • 30-3-0 (17 KOs)
7	**BRANDON FIGUEROA**	U.S. • 25-2-1 (19 KOs)
8	**MIRCO CUELLO**	Argentina • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
9	**BRUCE CARRINGTON**	U.S. • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
10	**ROBEISY RAMIREZ**	Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C	**NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO	Japan • 29-0-0 (26 KOs)
1	**MARLON TAPALES**	Philippines • 39-4-0 (20 KOs)
2	**MURODJON AKHMADALIEV**	Uzbekistan • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
3	**LUIS NERY**	Mexico • 36-2-0 (28 KOs)
4	**SAM GOODMAN**	Australia • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
5	**ALAN PICASSO**	Mexico • 31-0-1 (17 KOs)
6	**SHABAZ MASOUD**	U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)
7	**TJ DOHENY**	Ireland • 26-5-0 (20 KOs)
8	**ELIJAH PIERCE**	U.S. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
9	**RAMON CARDENAS**	U.S. • 26-1-0 (14 KOs)
10	**SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ**	Mexico • 19-0-0 (18 KOs)

RING RATINGS ANALYSIS Through fights of March 8, 2025

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 JUNTO NAKATANI WBC
Japan • 30-0-0 (23 KOs)
2 RYOSUKE NISHIDA IBF
Japan • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
3 SEIYA TSUTSUMI WBA
Japan • 12-0-3 (8 KOs)
4 YOSHIKI TAKEI WBO
Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
5 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
6 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
Puerto Rico • 22-3-0 (13 KOs)
7 DAIGO HIGA
Japan • 21-3-2 (19 KOs)
8 TENSHIN NASUKAWA
Japan • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
9 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (19 KOs)
10 JEYVIER CINTRON
Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C JESSE RODRIGUEZ RING, WBC
U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
1 FERNANDO MARTINEZ WBA
Argentina • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 44-4-0 (28 KOs)
3 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 31-3-1 (16 KOs)
4 PHUMELELE CAFU WBO
South Africa • 11-0-3 (8 KOs)
5 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 20-2-0 (11 KOs)
6 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 43-5-1 (28 KOs)
7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)
8 DAVID JIMENEZ
Costa Rica • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
9 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 58-6-1 (47 KOs)
10 PEDRO GUEVARA
Mexico • 42-5-1 (22 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 ANGEL AYALA IBF
Mexico • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 KENSHIRO TERAJI WBC
Japan • 24-1-0 (15 KOs)
3 SEIGO YURI AKUI WBA
Japan • 21-2-1 (11 KOs)
4 GALAL YAFAI
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
5 RICARDO SANDOVAL
U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
6 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
7 ANTHONY OLASCUAGA WBO
U.S. • 8-1-0 (6 KOs)
8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 39-6-1 (27 KOs)
9 TOBIAS REYES
Argentina • 16-1-1 (15 KOs)
10 YANKIEL RIVERA
Puerto Rico • 7-0-0 (3 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 MASAMICHI YABUKI IBF
Japan • 17-4-0 (16 KOs)
2 SHOKICHI IWATA WBO
Japan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
3 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA
S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
4 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 27-3-1 (19 KOs)
5 ADRIAN CURIEL
Mexico • 25-6-1 (5 KOs)
6 THANONGSAK SIMSRI
Thailand • 38-1-0 (34 KOs)
7 CRISTIAN ARANETA
Philippines • 25-2-0 (20 KOs)
8 REGIE SUGANOB
Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
9 ERICK ROSA WBA
Dom. Rep. • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)
10 ELWIN SOTO
Mexico • 21-3-1 (13 KOs)

Maud SAKRI

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C OSCAR COLLAZO RING, WBA, WBO
U.S. • 11-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 MELVIN JERUSALEM WBC
Philippines • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
2 PEDRO TADURAN IBF
Philippines • 17-4-1 (13 KOs)
3 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 25-1-0 (9 KOs)
4 YUDAI SHIGEOKA
Japan • 9-1-0 (5 KOs)
5 GINJIRO SHIGEOKA
Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
6 HASANBOY DUSMATOV
Uzbekistan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)
7 DIANXING ZHU
China • 14-1-0 (12 KOs)
8 SIYAKHOLWA KUSE
S. Africa • 8-2-1 (4 KOs)
9 YUNI TAKADA
Japan • 16-8-3 (6 KOs)
10 JOEY CANOY
Philippines • 23-5-2 (14 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Women's Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of March 12, 2025 • By Diego Morilla

Nic Antaya

Claressa Shields (left) remains No. 1 in the women's P4P ratings.

It could have been a career-damaging event, but in the end, Claressa Shields was largely exonerated from her positive result for marijuana during a routine test after her win over Danielle Perkins on February 2 in Shields' hometown of Flint. The finding originally led the Michigan Unarmed Combat Commission to impose a 90-day suspension that now appears to be on its way to being overturned.

Currently holding the coveted Ring middleweight championship as well as the No. 1 position in our pound-for-pound ratings, Shields is considered a trailblazer in the sport and one of the greatest female fighters of all time. A drug-related suspension could potentially smear her entire career and place an asterisk on her resume. But as the investigation unfolded, it was determined that only "trace amounts" of THC (the active component found in cannabis) were found in a sample taken from a swab used in Shields' mouth.

Since cannabis is legal and widely consumed in many states (including Michigan, where the fight took place), and since the amounts of THC in Shields' system were significantly low, both the World Boxing Council (one of the sanctioning bodies present at the fight) and the Association of Boxing Commissions decried the Michigan suspension as "exaggerated" and demanded more proof before honoring the suspensions on the national and international stages. At least two other fighters on that same card tested positive for THC. Shields and others have claimed that they were exposed to marijuana smoke at the stadium.

As per The Ring's rules, a positive test is grounds for stripping a fighter of any titles and placement in our ratings. The situation remains fluid, and new developments could materialize at any moment. But it is the decision of The Ring to give Shields the benefit of the doubt until the matter is properly decided, following similar decisions with other fighters that were allowed the same courtesy.

If Shields is forthcoming and trustworthy on this subject, the matter will probably be solved swiftly, and it will soon be part of the past.

POUND-FOR-POUND: The mythical list of the best fighters in the world regardless of weight was in need of an overhaul, and a few results in the past month provided reasons for a major shakeup. Lauren Price's superb performance against Natasha Jonas convinced the panel that it was time for Price to skyrocket past her own projected inflation chart. She kicked in the door and landed at No. 7, dragging fellow Team GB member Caroline Dubois along in the process – Dubois entered at No. 9 on the tail of a win over South Korea's Bo Mi Re Shin. Natasha Jonas (No. 9 last month) and Mikaela Mayer (No. 10) were ousted to make room for the two newest members of the roster.

WOMEN'S RING RATINGS ANALYSIS Through fights of March 12, 2025

WELTERWEIGHT: The megafight of the month delivered exactly what it promised, as Price held on to her Ring belt with a magnificent display of talent. Jonas was as game as ever, but age is starting to show on her, and with Mayer-Sandy Ryan 2 already on the horizon, it's time to start dropping her to a more realistic position, currently set at No. 2.

Jessica McCaskill, who is now retired, was removed from the list, and after careful consideration, Puerto Rico's Stephanie Piñeiro Aquino was picked to enter at No. 5 to fill the void. Also, as a result of Lauren Price's rise to the championship level, Michaela Kotaskova crashed the party, entering at No. 4.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: With the entire division invested in the Katie Taylor sweepstakes, rated fighters are carefully measuring their actions as they wait for the legendary Irish fighter to complete her trilogy with Amanda Serrano on July 11. One of the candidates to take on Taylor eventually is Samantha Worthington, who scored a win over Lithuania's Vaida Masiokaite that failed to convince the panel to move her past our current No. 1, Chantelle Cameron.

LIGHTWEIGHT: Dubois' solid victory over Shin helped the Londoner hold on to her No. 1 position and made the case for an urgent Ring title fight for her as well. Shin gave a good account of herself, and since this is her second fight above 130 (third in her last four) she entered the ratings at No. 5 at the expense of Uruguay's Maira Moneo.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: Shin's new rating at 135 created a vacancy at 130 that was swiftly filled by France's Rima Ayadi, an unbeaten challenger who seems committed to the division as her fellow fighters insist on moving up or down with dizzying speed.

FEATHERWEIGHT: Karriss Artingstall, a talented young gun, was clamoring for wider recognition and finally got it with a win over Raven Chapman in a fight for neighborhood bragging rights between two tough and skilled British contenders. Chapman, who lost to No. 1-rated Skye Nicolson in her previous fight, was replaced at No. 5 by Artingstall.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: Germany's Phannarai Netisri continues to make waves in the division, and this time she remained unbeaten against Milena Koleva in what could be her last fight in the minor leagues. No rating for now, but she's one of the young talents to watch in this division.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Miyo Yoshida scored a win over Beata Dudek that was considered enough to keep the nails-tough Japanese former titlist at No. 5 in a competitive division. But then, in waltzed Mexico's Diana Laura Fernandez with a superb effort in a war against Japan's Terumi Nuki.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1	**CLARESSA SHIELDS** U.S. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
2	**KATIE TAYLOR** Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
3	**CHANTELLE CAMERON** U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
4	**AMANDA SERRANO** Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
5	**DINA THORSLUND** Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
6	**GABRIELA FUNDORA** U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
7	**LAUREN PRICE** U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
8	**YOKASTA VALLE** Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
9	**CAROLINE DUBOIS** U.K. • 11-0-1 (5 KOS)
10	**ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)

Fernandez surged toward the end to leave a fantastic impression that earned her a return to the ratings, where she now sits at No. 5 at the expense of Yoshida, who was thus bumped out.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Four fantastic fighters saw action during this period. Evelin Bermudez had one of the best nights of her life against a legend in Tenkai Tsunami. It took Bermudez's insane athleticism and accuracy to save the day for her, especially as she held off Tsunami's late rally, and remain rated at No. 1. On the same card, former flyweight Ring champ Gabriela Alaniz was her usual aggressive self against Graciela Cortes. Alaniz took a few rounds to shake off the rust but seemed strong and fast in her new division (she had never fought at 108 before), looking very much like a contender in this super-competitive weight class. Alaniz took the No. 5 position from Anabel Ortiz, who moved down to 105 pounds, and claims she will remain at 108 from now on. Sara Bailey (No. 3 last month) scored a dominant win at home against a subpar opponent, but that effort paled in comparison to that of No. 4-rated Lourdes Juarez, who at 38 years old scored a stoppage against Mirna Sanchez with a belt at stake. Juarez and Bailey switched places.

STRAWWEIGHT: The Sol Cudos-Sol Baumstarh title fight for all the marbles and neighborhood bragging rights had to be suspended in Argentina when Baumstarh showed up at the weigh-in with a bad case of sinusitis, but the clash will take place soon. They better hurry, because formerly rated American contender Yadira Bustillos is putting them on notice after her dominant win over Argentina's Tamara Demarco via TKO. And to make matters more interesting, two top-rated fighters dropped down to 105 and put on a terrific performance as former junior flyweight titleholder Kim Clavel and perennial multi-titleholder Anabel Ortiz engaged in a war from bell to bell, with Clavel winning by UD. This was Clavel's debut at the weight and Ortiz's return after a long time, so if their intentions to remain at strawweight are serious, they will most likely enter the ratings after their next outings. RING

Zac Goodwin

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- **C** **SAVANNAH MARSHALL** RING, IBF
  U.K. • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 9-2-0 (2 KOs)
- **2** **SHADASIA GREEN** WBO
  U.S. • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **LANI DANIELS**
  New Zealand • 11-2-2 (1 KO)
- **4** **MARY CASAMASSA**
  U.S. • 6-0-0 (1 KO)
- **5** **CITLALLI ORTIZ**
  Mexico • 4-1-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, WBA
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **1** **DESLEY ROBINSON** IBF
  Australia • 9-3-0 (3 KOs)
- **2** **MELINDA WATPOOL**
  Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **3** **MAPULE NGUBANE**
  S. Africa • 14-9-3 (3 KOs)
- **4** **ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO**
  Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)
- **5** **CHLOE CHAOS**
  Australia • 6-1-1 (3 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C.** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **OSHAE JONES** IBF
  U.S. • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **2** **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
  Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
- **3** **FEMKE HERMANS**
  Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
- **4** **MARY SPENCER** WBA
  Canada • 9-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **5** **PRISCILLA PETERLE**
  France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** **LAUREN PRICE** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
  U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
- **1** **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
  U.S. • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
- **2** **NATASHA JONAS**
  U.K. • 16-3-1 (9 KOs)
- **3** **SANDY RYAN**
  U.K. • 7-2-1 (3 KOs)
- **4** **MICHAELA KOTASKOVA**
  Czech Rep. • 9-0-2 (4 KOs)
- **5** **STEPHANIE AQUINO**
  Puerto Rico • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  Ireland • 24-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **1** **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
  U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON**
  U.S. • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **FLORA PILI**
  France • 10-0-0 (1 KO)
- **4** **ELIZABETH OSHOBA**
  Nigeria • 8-0 (5 KOs)
- **5** **ELHEM MEKHALED**
  France • 17-3 (3 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C.** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **CAROLINE DUBOIS** WBC
  U.K. • 11-0-1 (5 KOs)
- **2** **BEATRIZ FERREIRA** IBF
  Brazil • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
- **3** **TERRI HARPER** WBO
  U.K. • 15-2-2 (6 KOs)
- **4** **RHIANNON DIXON**
  U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
- **5** **BO MI RE SHIN**
  South Korea • 18-3-3 (10 KOS)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C** **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **1** **DELFINE PERSOON**
  Belgium • 49-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **2** **LEILA BEAUDOIN**
  Canada • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
- **3** **JENNIFER MIRANDA**
  Spain • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
- **4** **MEA MOTU**
  New Zealand • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **5** **RIMA AYADI**
  France • 11-0-0 (1 KO)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** **AMANDA SERRANO** RING, WBA, WBO
  Puerto Rico • 47-3-1 (31 KOs)
- **1** **SKYE NICOLSON** WBC
  Australia • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
- **2** **NINA MEINKE** IBF
  German • 19-3-0 (4 KOs)
- **3** **SARAH MAHFOUD**
  Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **4** **DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
  Argentina • 32-5-3 (12 KOs)
- **5** **KARRISS ARTINGSTALL**
  U.K. • 7-0-0 (1 KO)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** **ELLIE SCOTNEY** RING, IBF, WBO
  U.K. • 10-0-0 (0 KOs)
- **1** **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
  Mexico • 24-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **2** **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE**
  France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
- **3** **NAZARENA ROMERO** WBA
  Argentina • 14-0-2 (8 KOs)
- **4** **ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ**
  Mexico • 17-2-1 (3 KOs)
- **5** **MIKIAH KREPS**
  U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **DINA THORSLUND** RING, WBC, WBO
  Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **YULIAHN LUNA AVILA**
  Mexico • 27-4-1 (4 KOs)
- **2** **CHERNEKA JOHNSON** WBA
  Australia • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **3** **NINA HUGHES**
  U.K. • 6-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **4** **SHURRETTA METCALF** IBF
  U.S. • 14-4-1 (2 KOs)
- **5** **DIANA LAURA FERNANDEZ**
  Mexico • 34-4-1 (5 KOS)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIZUKI HIRUTA** WBO
  Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
- **2** **CARLA MERINO**
  Argentina • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
- **3** **GINNY FUCHS**
  U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
- **4** **ADELAIDA RUIZ**
  U.S. • 16-1-1 (8 KOs)
- **5** **ASLEY GONZALEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 17-2 (7 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **GABRIELA FUNDORA** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **1** **GABRIELA ALANIZ**
  Argentina • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **2** **MARLEN ESPARZA**
  U.S. • 15-2-0 (1 KO)
- **3** **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
  Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **ARELY MUCINO**
  Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
- **5** **IBETH ZAMORA**
  Mexico • 33-8-0 (13 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **EVELIN BERMUDEZ** IBF, WBO
  Argentina • 21-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **2** **KIM CLAVEL**
  Canada • 21-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **3** **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
  Mexico • 38-4-0 (5 KOs)
- **4** **SARA BAILEY** WBA
  Canada • 6-0 (0 KOs)
- **5** **GABRIELA ALANIZ**
  Argentina • 16-2-0 (6 KOS)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **YOKASTA VALLE** WBC
  Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **SARAH BORMANN** WBO
  Germany • 19-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **YUKO KUROKI** WBA
  Japan • 24-8-2 (10 KOs)
- **4** **SOL CUDOS**
  Argentina • 9-0-2 (3 KOs)
- **5** **SOL BAUMSTARH**
  Argentina • 12-6-1 (8 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

- **C** **TINA RUPPRECHT** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO
  Germany • 14-1-1 (3 KOs)
- **1** **SUMIRE YAMANAKA** IBF
  Japan • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **2** **ERI MATSUDA**
  Japan • 7-2-1 (1 KO)
- **3** **ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS**
  Mexico • 9-0-1 (0 KOs)
- **4** **FABIANA BYTYQI**
  Czech Republic • 21-1-2 (5 KOs)
- **5** **NAO UGAWA**
  Japan • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)

Mohammed Alakel

Age: 20
Birthplace: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Weight class: Junior lightweight
Amateur Record: 7-0
Turned Pro: 2024
Pro record: 3-0
Trainer: Joe Gallagher

Maud SAKRI

BEST NIGHT: With just 10 fights under his belt in amateur and professional boxing combined, Alakel's record is low in numbers but high in promise. "Mighty Mo" has grown up in public on big events and is already finding his groove.

His fight against Joshua Ocampo, part of the Usyk-Fury 2 event, showcased what he and his trainer, Joe Gallagher, have been working on: Press, press, press with a reaching jab. Step back and load up with alternating hooks. Alakel also has a stinging right that dropped Ocampo in the second round, and he is increasingly searching for right uppercuts.

"Now we're beginning to see, as I call it, a nasty side to him, a spiteful side to him that he's beginning to enjoy hurting people," said Gallagher. "That's an art that you have to learn, how to lock on and finish people."

WHAT'S NEXT: Alakel's short- and long-term plans are very clear – he wants to go all the way. "Building up my record, gaining experience and reaching the pinnacle," he said. "I wouldn't be boxing if I didn't want to become a world champion. Whatever opportunity comes my way, I'll take it."

Gallagher nods in agreement with this statement before strategically adding: "We'll get a couple more fights, and then we'll try and get a youth belt, and then go through the regional belts – because they want to move him quick. I've been told he's got to make sure he's ready, and they'll provide the opportunities for him."

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: Alakel has earned the trust of his trainer, and that's saying a lot. Gallagher was The Ring's Trainer of the Year back in 2015 and has been in the running for the award many times since then. He has guided some of the U.K.'s top talents, including former world titleholders Anthony Crolla, Scott Quigg, Natasha Jonas, Liam and Callum Smith (as well as brothers Stephen and Paul) and two-time title challenger Matthew Macklin, among many others. With a reputation like that to protect, he pulls no punches and is known for his brutal honesty.

"We're dealing with a kid who does have the potential that he has shown me over the last 12 months. He listens and is absolutely on it."

According to Joe, beyond talent, it's Mohammed's grit that sets him apart.

"He has got backbone, has got desire and will go through the wall. A lot of kids won't.

They get to it and won't go over it – he will. He'll need that down the line. This is a kid, I'm telling you now, when he gets to 10-0, you'll be hearing conversations about 'Mighty Mo.'

Joe then adds in his uniquely deadpan tone: "It's not to massage his ego. I'll soon tell him if he's shit.

"Even in the sparring in the gym, he's got Josh Holmes – he's the British [junior lightweight] champion – guys with 15-0 and 16-0. The competitiveness in the sparring, it's unreal.

"Mohammed is holding his own. Like with Alex Murphy that's just gone fighting now for a British title at [junior welterweight]. The kid is sparring good, seasoned pros, grown men. He's still a boy, but his time will come, and it's all good learning experience for him."

Alakel sums it up: "I'm such a competitive person, I just like that competitive environment. Each day, I'm just looking forward to getting the better out of my sparring opponent."

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: By virtue of his record still in the infancy stages, Alakel hasn't quite had an acid test to identify any glaring deficiencies in his game.

Perhaps the perception and pressure surrounding him may arouse suspicion before his boxing skills do. Being a Saudi and immediately fighting on huge Riyadh Season cards, and even being the focus of this mainstay column may invoke cries of tokenism.

Gallagher, having tested Mohammed's resolve, isn't having any of this. "This isn't a token gesture kid on the bill – Saudi kids to be on a show – just to represent Saudi. I tried to break him very early on and see if he could cope in that environment – the training, the pressure, everything that's expected – and he did."

There's also the stress of carrying the boxing hopes of an entire nation on your shoulders, in addition to being under the watchful eye of Turki Alalshikh.

Joe acknowledges that "there's pressure on Mo to be Saudi's first world champion. His Excellency wants him to fight every month. So whether we end up boxing on a big show, a smaller Manchester Frank Warren show at some point or whatever, he's got to be kept active. Just fight, fight, fight. So there's huge pressure on him. But how he handles that pressure is just like so cool, so calm, and there's a youthfulness still of where he is enjoying the sport."

For his part, Mohammed isn't overthinking it. "I feel like people [take boxing so seriously], it makes them not enjoy the sport, you know? I'm just enjoying every part of it, everything that comes with the life, and don't think about it too much. I'm blessed."

STORYLINES: Mohammed was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, but happened upon his love for boxing in Edinburgh, Scotland, of all places. Yes, you read that correctly.

"I was with my dad one day on the streets of Edinburgh in Scotland, and he took me to a boxing gym randomly, and I just fell in love with it. I think that's the case for a lot of boxers.

"Walking into the boxing gym, smelling that sweaty smell, seeing the bags, the chains, everything – I was like, 'This is my vibe.'"

From that moment on, he was hooked. "Every day at school, I was waiting all day for that last class to finish. Then I would rush home, get changed, and then run or cycle to the gym. I was looking forward to it every day."

During his school years in Scotland, he would return to Riyadh for vacations, but the contrast between the boxing scenes was stark.

"There were barely any boxing gyms, barely any boxing equipment. Unqualified boxing coaches."

Fast-forward to today, and Saudi Arabia is front and center in boxing's global expansion, and Alakel couldn't be more proud to play his part in it.

"To see how it's become such a big sport here, with all the kids improving, and then you've got the Mike Tyson Boxing Club up and running by Joe Gallagher. People are working hard to make boxing a big scene in Saudi Arabia. Seeing how things can change, that motivates me." RING

LIGHT HEAVY LIES THE CROWN

TWO HALL OF FAME WORLD CHAMPIONS HAVE VERY DIFFERENT OPINIONS ON THE **BIVOL VS. BETERBIEV** RIVALRY AND WHERE THESE FIGHTERS RANK IN BOXING HISTORY

By Tom Gray

As legendary ring announcer Michael Buffer was going through the introductions for the undisputed light heavyweight rematch between champion Artur Beterbiev and challenger Dmitry Bivol, I fondly envisioned a few of boxing history's most memorable collisions at 175 pounds.

The scenes at The Venue in Riyadh conjured up images of Archie Moore vs. Yvon Durelle from 1958, Bob Foster vs. Dick Tiger from 1968, and Michael Spinks vs. Dwight Muhammad Qawi from 1983. I was watching grainy versions of these fights on VHS tape 30 years ago. All of the light heavyweight marbles were at stake on those glory nights, and now, just a few feet away, was the 2025 equivalent.

It was a privilege to be there.

When the bell sounded, Beterbiev and Bivol resumed their rivalry with the same energy and fighting spirit that laced their first encounter in October. This was Round 13. Beterbiev cut off the ring rapidly and released his signature power shots, while the quick-moving Bivol sought the escape routes, jabbed brilliantly and countered with quick-fisted attacks from the outside. At the end of 12 action-packed rounds, Bivol had evened the score, offsetting his majority decision loss to Beterbiev last October with an MD victory of his own.

At ringside was the great Bernard Hopkins of Golden Boy Promotions. The former two-weight world champion and Hall of Famer had just watched one of his company's crown jewels, Vergil Ortiz Jr., make a late charge to outpoint former WBA junior middleweight titleholder Israil Madrimov on the undercard.

In September 2001, Hopkins became the first undisputed middleweight champion since Marvelous Marvin Hagler ruled that division in the 1980s. However, the old-school Philly warrior also enjoyed considerable success at light heavyweight, claiming Ring Magazine, IBF, WBA and WBC titles between 2006 and 2014. Also, like Beterbiev, Hopkins maintained his elite-level status and pound-for-pound position into his 40s – a rarity.

"Beterbiev and Bivol are great fighters because of those two fights. They displayed heart, skill, will and determination," Hopkins told me over the phone less than a week after the bout. "There's no loser in those fights, and they're one-and-one now.

A sharp-dressed Bernard Hopkins offers some sharp-tongued advice from ringside at the Beterbiev-Bivol 2 card.

"Both of them are my brothers. I respect them. I hope they fight again, because we don't get fights like this all the time. Back in the day, we had Ali vs. Frazier, then we had Micky Ward and Arturo Gatti. Now we got Beterbiev-Bivol and a trilogy coming soon in 2025."

Lofty praise indeed from Hopkins, who is renowned for being a straight shooter when it comes to the ring exploits of others. In the past, the ex-champ has even risked business relationships with fighters he promotes in favor of honest self-expression (see Ryan Garcia). If the outspoken Hopkins saw reason to be critical of Beterbiev and Bivol, then you can bet your bottom dollar that he wouldn't have held back.

However, not all former champions were as impressed.

"I didn't see the first fight, and if the rematch was anything to go by, I'm glad I missed it," laughed acclaimed coach Buddy McGirt when I called him at his gym in Florida. "They're both good fighters, don't get me wrong. Beterbiev is a good fighter and Bivol is a good fighter. But to call them great … no. To call them great is an insult to Roy Jones; it's an insult to Ezzard Charles; it's an insult to Archie Moore; it's an insult to Antonio Tarver; and it's an insult to Michael Spinks. To call these guys great is an insult to the greats. Are they good? Yes, they're good fighters. They're very good fighters; I give them that. Great? No.

"Great fighters make adjustments in the heat of battle. Nobody made adjustments [in the rematch]. The only difference, from what I heard, is that Bivol threw more punches than he did in the first fight. But for the first six rounds, it was like [Beterbiev] was chasing a rabbit. That's my opinion. You've got boxing and you've got running. Let's be realistic now … [Bivol] was literally running. When you say boxing, you look at a guy like Sugar Ray Leonard; he's moving, throwing combinations – that's boxing."

You might be taken aback by McGirt's review of the rematch and its participants. Many have tabbed the Beterbiev-Bivol sequel as a Fight of the Year contender. However, McGirt has forgotten more about boxing than most of us will ever know and has earned his stripes. Outside of being a world-class trainer, the amiable New Yorker is a former two-weight world champion and a Hall of Famer. At the height of his career, during the early 1990s, this man was rated within the top 5 best pound-for-pound fighters on the planet, according to The Ring.

Buddy McGirt and light heavyweight contender Callum Smith.

Having spoken to McGirt first, I informed Hopkins of his friend's take on Beterbiev vs. Bivol 2 and began to go through Buddy's reasoning.

"Can I give my rebuttal?" said Hopkins before he'd heard everything. "You need my rebuttal. Buddy McGirt, as much as I respect him as a teacher of the game, is wrong on this one. He is wrong on this one. Buddy is getting old. (laughs)

"If you judge the fight on how adjustments weren't made, even though the winner wasn't given a clear path to dictate anything, there were close rounds where Beterbiev and Bivol had to do a little bit more just to win a round. Those rounds were so hard to judge based on punch output and who got the better of those rounds.

"When Bivol did good in the first minute and a half, Beterbiev came on and the crowd became excited and energized. A lot of times in close rounds, the judges are swung by 30 seconds of punching and the crowd yelling, especially when the first minute and a half were back and forth. You need to figure out who won those rounds, and [some people will go by the last thing they heard and saw]. Those championship rounds were just like that."

As Hopkins stated, he is gung ho on a Bivol-Beterbiev rubber match and foresees more of the same if it becomes a reality. "The second fight warrants a third fight. It will be just as hard to score, and it will take a toll on both guys' health," he said. Meanwhile, McGirt has no interest in fight three, and when I mentioned Roy Jones vs. Antonio Tarver being the last significant light heavyweight trilogy, he wouldn't hear of it. McGirt trained Tarver for all three of those fights.

McGirt: "No comparison at all. Realistically, would you want to see a third fight [between Beterbiev and Bivol]?"

The Ring: "I would. And I need to be honest, Buddy: If you're asking me that question, I didn't want to see Tarver vs. Jones 3. Antonio had made his mark. In my opinion, he beat Jones the first time, knocked him spark out the second time, then Jones was knocked out by Glen Johnson. There was no need for a trilogy."

McGirt: "I agree with that one thousand percent. But my question is this: Why would you want to see a third fight [between Bivol and Beterbiev]?"

The Ring: "I thought Bivol edged the first fight and Beterbiev got the decision. In the rematch, Bivol got the decision, but it was still very close. I don't think we can say, definitively, who the better man is. The third fight decides the best light heavyweight of this generation."

McGirt pondered my reasoning for a moment before committing to an answer. "I'll agree with you on that, yes," he said. "Whoever wins the trilogy is the best light heavyweight of this generation."

When I dictated this conversation to Hopkins, the former champ opened up on McGirt and me.

"Tarver destroyed Roy Jones. I'm surprised that you or Buddy offered the comparison," barked Hopkins in disbelief. "Roy was knocked out by Glen Johnson before the third fight. I mean, c'mon, man; I know my stuff, and I do a lot of research.

"Bivol and Beterbiev are gonna go down as great fighters based on what will, hopefully, be the three fights that they're gonna complete. Both of those guys want to be 2-1 up on the trilogy."

It should be pointed out that McGirt was in Riyadh to work the corner of

Mark Robinson

Bivol celebrates his new collection of light heavyweight belts.

British light heavyweight Callum Smith, who looked excellent in handing Joshua Buatsi his first career defeat on the undercard. This was Smith's second fight back since succumbing to a crushing seventh-round TKO loss to Beterbiev in January 2024. While McGirt was quick to point out that Smith suffered a rib injury in sparring, which hampered his preparation for that fight, he did acknowledge the potency of the former champion's offense.

"Beterbiev knows how to break your will, man; he's good at that. He gets in your ass and he stays in your ass," stated McGirt. "The question is: What's he gonna do when he's up against someone that can punch just a little bit harder than him?

"You know he's gonna be there, which is OK. But again, what is he gonna do against a guy who's a little bit stronger and punches a little bit harder? What kind of adjustments is he gonna be able to make? That's the question."

Hopkins was different stylistically from Beterbiev and Bivol but more comparable to the latter when he campaigned at light heavyweight in his late 30s and 40s. Like Bivol, he frequently went the long route in pursuit of victory and relied exclusively on his ring IQ. He was more the diffuser than the destroyer.

"Bivol, to me, has like Bruce Lee cat reflexes, [is] fast on his feet, knows how to move, and he's very hard to hit despite being right in front of you," said Hopkins with respect. "He's more of a fencer than a mover, and if you miss, you're gonna pay."

When Hopkins was in the light heavyweight mix for almost a decade, he was surrounded by elite-level talent. Switching his ring moniker from "The Executioner" to "The Alien," he posted otherworldly victories over Tarver, Kelly Pavlik and Jean Pascal, usurping George Foreman as the oldest world champion in boxing history.

While he lost fights at 175 pounds, notably against Joe Calzaghe, Chad Dawson and Sergey Kovalev, Hopkins made his mark and was one of the best light heavyweights in the world at the time. Would Beterbiev and Bivol have been a threat if they'd been around back then?

"Yes, absolutely," said Hopkins immediately, his voice rising. "Because of their determination and toughness. Whether they would have won at the end or not, they would have been there for a fight. That is off the cuff and I don't even have to hesitate. They've got heart and determination to win fights. You can't make that up, and you damn sure can't teach them that.

"Now, let me tell you about the skill level. Skill would have been an advantage for me and for Tarver. I didn't have a big amateur career. Tarver did, and that's how he knew how to fight Roy Jones. But the reason why [Beterbiev and Bivol] would have given anyone in my second weight class problems is because of their determination and the skills that they have.

"When I look at both of those guys from ringside, they would have given anybody, from Roy Jones to me, the A-side of that division at the time, the B-side, they would have given anybody hell."

Bivol currently has a record of 24-1 (12 KOs) and is 13-1 in title fights. With similar stats, Beterbiev is 21-1 (20 KOs) and is now 10-1 in championship bouts. Both men have held undisputed honors and hold high positions on any pound-for-pound list worth reading. Those are incredible achievements in the 21st century, but how do Bivol and Beterbiev stack up against the light heavyweight legends of the distant past?

Ezzard Charles was never champion at the weight but went 16-2 against Hall of Famers Jimmy Bivins, Charley Burley, Lloyd Marshall, Joey Maxim and Archie Moore. Moore knocked out more opponents than any other world titleholder and held the light heavyweight championship for a decade. Bob Foster was undisputed for six years and was so dominant that he had to challenge heavyweights to be tested. Michael Spinks reigned supreme during the 1980s golden era to stake his claim on greatness.

Can Bivol and Beterbiev be compared to these fighters?

"Now you're talking about something totally different. No, now you're talking crazy, man. Whatever doctor you're seeing, change it," responded Hopkins. "You were doing swell for the last hour, but now you're showing your age. I won't even bully you by telling you it was 15 rounds back then. Even my era wouldn't have done as well. It was just different, man.

"Ezzard Charles is the best of all time. Those light heavyweights are great, man. That's why I'm so glad that I went up to light heavyweight. I'm the only guy that I know of who skipped 168 and went straight to light heavyweight. I dared to be great, and fighters have that opportunity in this new era called Riyadh Season."

The highest summit a champion can reach is proving themselves the best of their generation. Fights against other champions from other eras are confined to the fantasy section, and such debates will always split opinion. If you take on the best and you're the last man standing – like Hopkins was at 160 – then the title of all-time great is within your grasp.

McGirt is old-school and believes that too many fighters are labeled great before their time. I can certainly understand where he's coming from. Hopkins, every bit as old-school as McGirt, is leaving the door open for this generation, probably remembering all the critics who refused to compare him to the likes of Carlos Monzon and Hagler when he was at his zenith. Hopkins got there in the end.

Time will tell how history remembers Bivol and Beterbiev. The rubber match and subsequent chapters in their respective careers will give us all the answers. RING

KEYSHAWN TO THE KINGDOM

NOW A WORLD TITLEHOLDER, **KEYSHAWN DAVIS** IS A POTENTIAL POUND-FOR-POUND SUPERSTAR WITH THE AMBITION AND CONFIDENCE TO MATCH HIS FORMIDABLE SKILLS

By Thomas Gerbasi

Al Bello

The Instagram post from February 15 said it all when it comes to where Keyshawn Davis' head and heart are at.

The Norfolk, Virginia, native had just taken his first world title from Denys Berinchyk at The Theatre at Madison Square Garden, and in the locker room after the fight, he took some photos with his new belt and his biggest fan: his five-month-old son, Keyshawn Jr.

"DaDa did it Big Boy," Davis wrote. "We Champions Of The World!"

After a long week in the Big Apple, complete with some heated exchanges with his Ukrainian foe and a disgusting racial incident that saw a box of bananas and a watermelon delivered to Keyshawn's hotel room from an unknown source, followed by some tasteless trolling from Teofimo Lopez, this was the feel-good moment needed for Team Davis.

But Junior stole the show with his wide-eyed expression as he touched dad's WBO lightweight championship strap. Is this an early sign that Junior might one day put on the gloves?

"Hell, no," the new champ said. "For what? I did all the hard work. I'm making the job easy."

That's true in two ways. At 26 years old, Davis is already laying a foundation that guarantees his family will be financially secure long after he retires. Second, all that hard work has allowed him to make his job look easy.

That's impressive in any weight class, but especially in the lightweight division. Then again, Davis was built for this, and success was expected from the 2020 Olympic silver medalist. It wasn't a question if Davis was going to win a world title, but when.

"When" was Valentine's Day 2025, and it only took "The Businessman" four rounds to finish the job. It was expected by the fighter, his fans and the media, but he still enjoyed the entire process and wants some more.

"I kind of expected it because I just knew that I was going to beat this guy up," Davis said. "So I'm more so excited about what's to come, what I got next, what I got planned for the future. How far are we about to take this? This is my first world title. Now I got to go through my first defense, and then I do my first pay-per-view. So it's going to be a lot of first things for me now. And this was definitely one of the first big moments."

It wasn't just a big moment on fight night. During the lead-up to the event, there was a buzz around town, a feeling like something special was about to take place. And as Davis made the media rounds, he tossed cliches to the side and revealed himself in a more complete fashion than most of his peers. It's almost like he was made to be different. Most specifically, Davis' willingness to talk about difficulties from his past was a breath of fresh air.

"[KEYSHAWN HAS] BEEN THROUGH THE FIRE, AND WHEN YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH THE FIRE, YOU HAVE A MUCH BETTER CHANCE OF NOT PANICKING THE NEXT TIME IT GETS HOT."

That process began last November when he was scheduled to face Gustavo Lemos in Norfolk's Scope Arena. It was a homecoming event, a packed arena waiting to watch Davis and his brothers Keon and Kelvin compete, and the pressure was on. Or so you would think. ESPN's Mark Kriegel spoke to Davis at length on fight week, and the resulting interview took interest in the fighter to new levels while showing who he was at his core.

"I think we're all biased to the subjects who reveal themselves," said Kriegel. "And, to me, the idea that this kid was able to reveal his most vulnerable self on the eve of what was then not just his homecoming fight, but probably the biggest night of his life, says something extraordinary about him. We sat down for what I thought was going to be a pretty normal pre-fight interview, and he starts talking about being taken away in a straitjacket in high school.

"That's not necessarily what you want your young fighter to be talking about before his big fight against a guy who's blown weight by more than six pounds. And he kept on in pretty excruciating detail without any sense of ambivalence about it. And my feeling is that all of us have these shadow selves, particularly fighters, and usually that shadow self is the very reason why you became a fighter. But the idea that Keyshawn could make peace with the most vulnerable, screwed-up version of himself in public on the eve of this big night, to me, that makes him an extraordinary kid – but also as a fighter, pretty dangerous."

Davis didn't blink when Lemos clocked in at 141.5 pounds for the lightweight bout, and he proceeded to drop his foe three times en route to a second-round knockout win that lifted his perfect record to 12-0 with eight knockouts. He was ready for gold and everything that came along with it. That meant making the story of his short stay in a mental institution during high school part of his narrative – not necessarily for his benefit, but for others.

"I realize everything that God has planned for me is not about me; it's about his people," said Davis. "I'm just an influencer that can influence a lot of people on the platform that he put me on. So it's my job to tell people my story so I can inspire people. And this is why I say things about my mental health. It's not for the ones that are going on social media and saying things about it. It's for the ones that's not saying nothing about it; it's for the ones that's going through it in the darkness without their family even knowing they're going through it. But they hear me talk like this and it's giving them more confidence to get through their day. You never know how a guy is feeling that day."

Al Bello

Davis entered the elite lightweight ranks by dominating Berinchyk.

One of those guys was beloved trainer Charlie Ibarra, a member of the Davis camp who also worked with welterweight up-and-comer Avious Griffin. Ibarra passed away just two weeks before the Berinchyk fight. His suicide hit everyone in the camp hard.

It was the one damper on Davis' victory celebration, and when you realize the toll mental health has on the population, young and old, it's remarkable that he not only made it out of that darkness but became a world titleholder. This is after going through a spell at 18 years old when his anxiety and dealing with the absence of his brother and father figure, Kelvin (who had moved out of their house), led him to self-harm and thoughts of suicide where he even held a gun to his head at one point. Counseling, family support and the brief stay in the hospital got him back on track, but still, it's remarkable to go on to an Olympic silver medal and a professional boxing world title after such an ordeal.

Al Bello

Beating Berinchyk was easy compared to what Davis overcame in life.

Yet renowned trainer and analyst Teddy Atlas isn't surprised.

"He's been through the fire, and when you've been through the fire, you have a much better chance of not panicking the next time it gets hot," Atlas said. "And I'll take it further. Actually getting comfortable in the heat, but at the same time understanding the difference between being comfortable in it and dealing with it and being consumed by it."

The fire is a good analogy for where Davis sits at the moment. Brian McIntyre knows something about that fire, too, and as the head coach of Davis and pound-for-pound great Terence Crawford, "BoMac" believes that being comfortable in that proverbial heat will separate the Norfolk native from his peers as the stakes grow higher.

"In a perfect world, I want Keyshawn to continue to grow," said McIntyre. "So whoever's available for him to defend his title, whoever's available for him to unify with, that's what I love, and that's what I want for the kid. Because when you put challenges like that in front of you, that's when you see the growth inside your champion. You see the heart inside them. Keyshawn don't shy away from nothing, man. He goes towards the smoke, he goes towards the fire, and he's like a firefighter. He's running out there to help; he's going towards the fire. So whoever's available for him and if it makes sense for him, let's go."

And that's the big question right now, isn't it? The initial coronation complete, now we'll see what's next for Davis in a division full of intriguing matchups. Will he chase the big fights against the likes of Gervonta Davis, Vasiliy Lomachenko, Lopez and even the man who kept him from gold in Tokyo, Andy Cruz? Or will he get a few defenses under his belt against lesser-named competition that will allow him to keep building his own profile? There are a lot of options. But maybe three days after being crowned is too early to ask Davis who's next.

"Honestly, man, I don't care about one specific person or nothing like that," Davis said. "I just want to make a big fight happen. I'm a world champion and I got a big name and I'm hot right now. So I'm not about to say I want to fight this person or that person. Whoever that other big name is that wants to fight me, the first big name that wants to fight me, we're going to make it happen."

In various pre- and post-fight interviews, Davis has mentioned Isaac "Pitbull" Cruz as a potential dance partner, and that fight would be an intriguing barometer to see where the new champ is at. Because while he has done all that's been asked of him thus far as a pro, he will readily admit that no one has forced him into deep waters yet. He won't give a specific name, but he will reveal the kind of opponent that fits the bill for him, and it's why he wants the big fights sooner rather than later.

"I'm young and I'm ready," he said. "And honestly, the real reason is that I haven't really been challenged as a professional yet. All my fights, they've been saying they're steps up and that this person might give me some sort of challenge and stuff like that, and they haven't lived up to it. I'm looking for someone that's actually going to challenge me in the ring, that's actually going to give me a fight. I get in the ring and I'm giving them guys a fight, and nine times out of 10, I'm stopping those guys or just beating them up for all those rounds. So I'm really out here just trying to find a challenge, somebody that's actually going to challenge 'The Businessman.'"

Despite Davis' amateur pedigree, 14 pro fights isn't a large sample size, regardless of what the likes of Lomachenko and heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk did in less than 20 bouts. So while Davis looks like the real deal, with the speed, power and fight IQ to succeed, when the competition level rises, will he do the same?

"I've been saying for the last year that he's starting to really impress me," said Atlas. "He's sitting down and not just moving for the sake of moving. Now he's stepping instead of moving. Instead of just floating, he's stepping, moving, changing range, controlling range, being responsible, getting an angle and doing appropriate things for what we say is supposed to be the sweet science. I've seen that. I've seen the maturity. I've seen the confidence. I've seen the understanding."

"I'M YOUNG AND I'M READY. AND HONESTLY ... I HAVEN'T REALLY BEEN CHALLENGED AS A PROFESSIONAL YET."

That respect for the craft is a dying art in the sport these days, as fighters often rely on athleticism and power to get their way in the ring with little regard for the finer points of the sport or the ability to listen to those who have been there before them. Davis has that respect for the game and is a willing learner, as well as leader, in the gym.

"That's one of the reasons why he picked our team and our team of coaches, because he wants to learn," said McIntyre. "He wants to learn on the high-end level. So I'm more than willing to work with the kid, and I love working with him. I love being around his family, being around him in the gym and just listening to him and his brothers talk. And that's a good thing for me. You ain't got to call him and tell him to come to the gym. You've got to pull him back. And that's great. Just being around different fighters and world champions, you can see that he wants it. You can see that he has that drive."

I mention to BoMac how it appears that Davis wants to fight everybody – and actually means it.

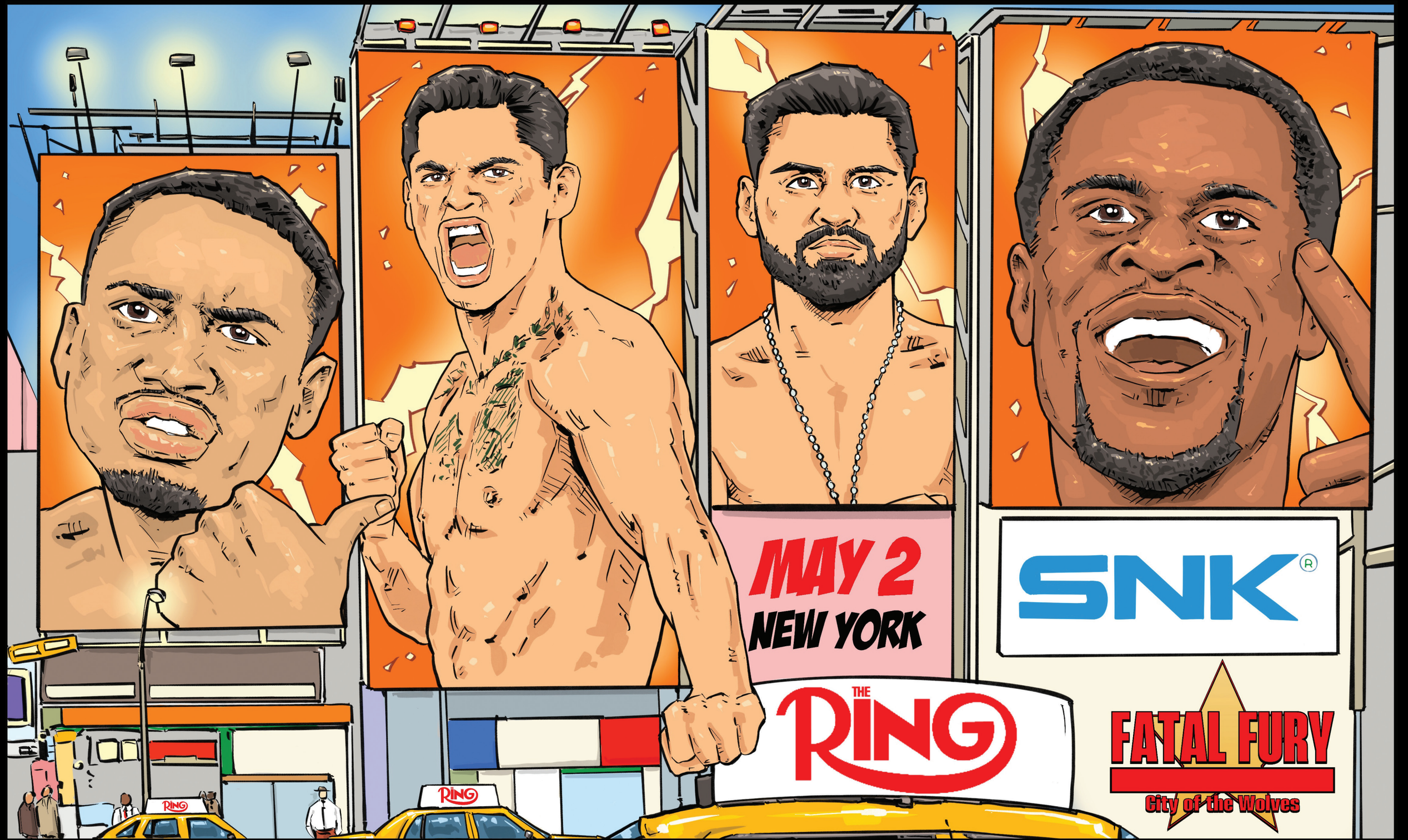
"Yeah, he definitely does," he laughs. "You know how Keyshawn is."

I think we do. It hasn't been a long journey, but it's been a good one and a revealing one. It's made Davis someone people want to root for, not just in Norfolk, but in New York and around the world. It's rare in a polarizing sports world where social media has made it easier to dislike someone than cheer for them. Why does Davis think people have embraced his story?

"I feel like it's because I'm authentic," Davis said. "I don't have nothing to hide. I show my true self. I'm one of the few fighters that goes live [on social media] at least twice a month and I speak my mind, but I don't speak out of emotion. I make sense with everything that I'm saying, and I'm authentic. I told my story. I told [fans] where I come from. I told them how I used to do things and how I'm changing. They see how I'm praising God every single time I'm on camera, and they see the authenticity in me. You can't deny that. You can't deny somebody just being genuinely real. That's the only thing I know how to be. So when you know yourself and you continue to be yourself, people are going to love that."

No one is going to love him like his son, though. And that feeling is mutual from dad, whose life was changed forever by the birth of Keyshawn Jr.

"This is a physical sport, and people get seriously injured. People die in this ring," said Davis. "So my main focus is coming out of this sport the same way I came in. Of course I want to be well-off, but I want to come out the same way I came in. I want him to have a father that can still run around with him and play with him and talk to him normally after my career is done. So that's the main thing I focus on." RING



Illustrations by KronkAAArt

TIMES SQUARE-OFF

A HISTORY-MAKING EVENT IN THE HEART OF NEW YORK CITY WILL SEE TWO BITTER ENEMIES VYING FOR THE CHANCE TO FACE OFF IN AN EAGERLY ANTICIPATED SEQUEL

By Michael Rosenthal

Rarely have both fighters in a major bout suffered such indignity.

One of them, an erratic but talented young power-puncher, scored what could've been a career-changing victory, only to test positive for a banned substance, lose his triumph, get suspended for a year and forfeit his $1.2 million purse. Disaster. His opponent that night saw his image as one of the sport's most respected young champions eviscerated when he went down three times against a 6-1 underdog and lost a majority decision. Some used the dreaded "E" word to describe his fate: Exposed.

The sad story could have a happy ending for either Ryan Garcia or Devin Haney, however.

They're both scheduled to fight on May 2 at Times Square in New York City, Garcia against Rolando Romero and Haney against Jose Ramirez. If Garcia and Haney win those fights, they will likely have a chance to get it right in a rematch this fall in Saudi Arabia.

"There are so many question marks from that fight that need to be answered," Haney told The Ring shortly after the May 2 card was announced. "I feel I'm a better fighter than Ryan. I was cheated; the world saw that I was cheated. That's not an opinion. There's actual proof that I was cheated.

"I'm looking to set the record straight and come out with a victory against him."

If the second meeting has half the drama of the first, fans had better brace themselves for a wild ride. The original, which took place in April 2024 across the Brooklyn Bridge at Barclays Center, was a compelling matchup between two of the biggest names in the sport – Haney unbeaten (31-0, 15 KOs), Garcia (24-1, 20 KOs) with only a loss to Gervonta Davis – but no one could've predicted the series of events that would unfold before, during and after the fight.

Garcia, who has acknowledged mental health issues, was typically bizarre in the lead-up. That included a moment at a pre-fight news conference in Los Angeles when he seemed to be buckling under pressure: "Sometimes the weight of the world feels like it's on my shoulders," he said glumly. The comment was strange, given that boxers generally project strength, not emotional fragility, going into a fight. Haney, sensing trouble, asked his foe repeatedly whether he planned to show up for the fight. Garcia never responded, leaving his mental state in doubt a few days before the event.

In an intriguing doubleheader, Devin Haney takes on Jose Ramirez and Ryan Garcia faces Rolly Romero.

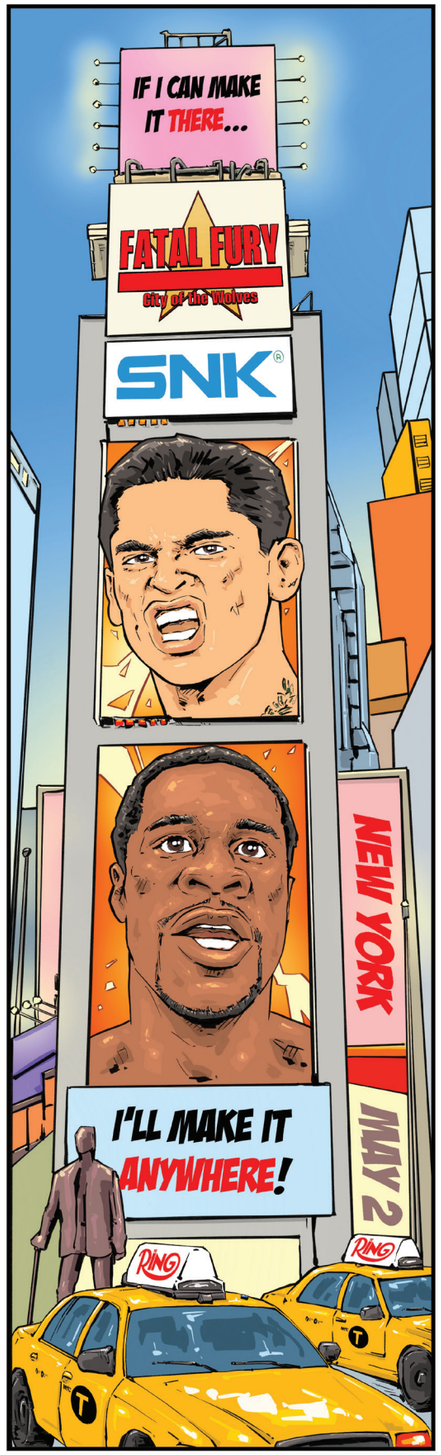
Amanda Westcott

Then things really started getting wacky: Garcia weighed in the day before the fight a whopping 3.2 pounds over the 140-pound limit, which precluded him from contending for Haney's WBC title. Haney, still confident of victory, agreed to go through with the fight after Garcia honored a bet to pay him $500,000 for every pound he was overweight, although Garcia reportedly coughed up only $600,000.

That decision would haunt Haney, beginning in the first moments of the fight.

It took Garcia only 40 seconds to demonstrate that his left hook – one of the best in the business – would be a significant problem for Haney, who backpedaled across the ring after taking a beauty on the chin. Haney responded well – winning the next five rounds on one card, four on the other two – but it seemed a matter of time before incessant pressure applied by Garcia would pay off again.

And it did. Haney went down as a result of the hook in Rounds 7, 10 and 11 in one of the most surreal stretches in recent history, considering Haney's reputation as a master boxer and the fact he had shut out former titleholder Regis Prograis in his previous fact. The knockdowns tilted the fight in Garcia's favor. Judge Max DeLuca scored it even (112-112), but he was overruled by Eric Marlinski (114-110) and Robin Taylor (115-109), who had the emotionally fragile underdog winning.



Garcia showed up for the fight.

"Ryan Garcia is a much better fighter than we give him credit for," Haney said in the recent interview. "It wasn't just a left hook that he did well. He did a lot of good things in the fight. He had flaws in the fight as well, but he did a lot of good things."

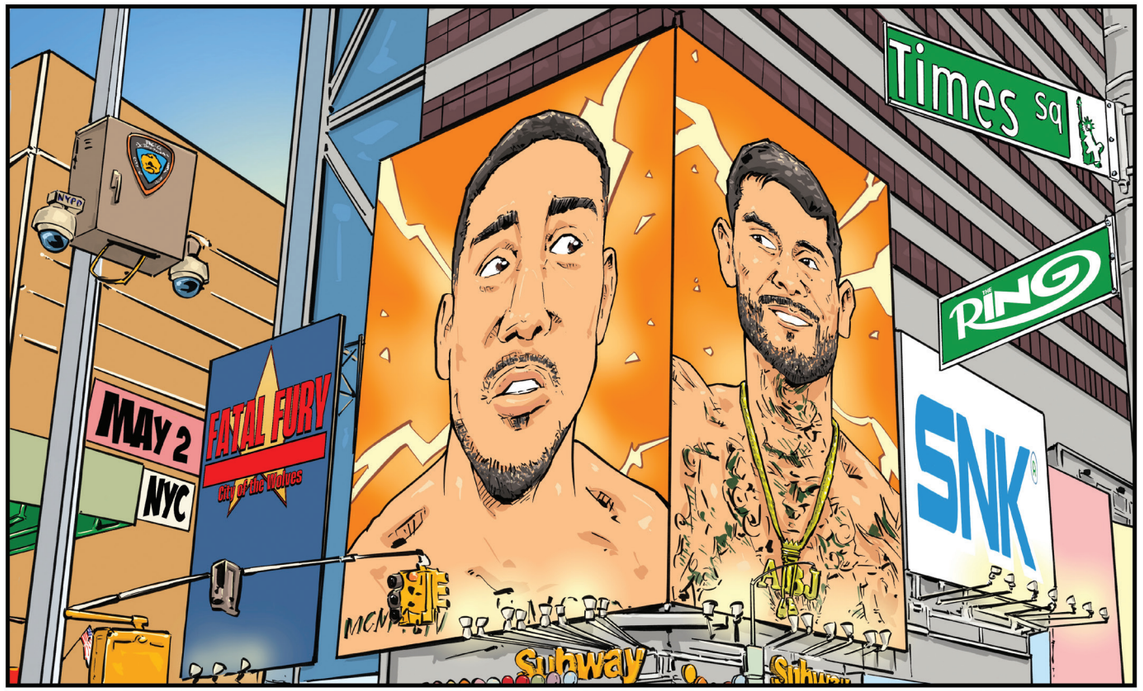
Indeed, he did. Garcia had pulled off a massive achievement, one that proved that he was more than a handsome social media star who drank too much and found himself in dark places too often. He had demonstrated that he had the ability to beat the best, which promised to open all sorts of doors for him going forward.

Then it was gone. News broke the Thursday after the fight that samples taken from Garcia the day before and day of the fight by the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association had tested positive for the illegal performance-enhancer ostarine. He and his team immediately went into damage control mode, claiming the positive test of his "A" samples (and later his "B" samples) was the result of a contaminated supplement.

That assertion generally doesn't absolve an athlete in Garcia's position, as he learned on June 20, when the New York State Athletic Commission declared the fight a no-contest, suspended him for one year retroactive to April 20 and seized his purse, although he still collected a percentage of profits. The forfeiture of $1.2 million was stunning even to Haney's handlers.

"It is a harsh result," Haney's attorney, Pat English, who has been around boxing for decades, told ESPN at the time. "I have never seen a $1.2 million forfeiture or anything remotely close to it."

It's been a year since the first



Garcia-Haney fight, enough time for the fighters and their teams to fully digest what happened.

Haney was asked during his recent interview what he thinks of now when he reflects on the worst experience of his boxing career. He didn't have to think a second to come up with an answer.

"The PEDs," he said, "The PEDs. That was the worst thing about it. At the end of the day, every time we step into that ring, I could be the winner or I could be the loser. I understand that. And I'm OK with it. I just want to be on a level playing field. I want it to be a fair fight. I want it to be done the correct way for me to fully acknowledge a loss."

Haney said "it drove me nuts" in the following weeks. "I felt like I lost a lot at that time. And I was cheated."

Did he lose a lot? After all, we know now that he fell to an opponent who was considerably bigger and juiced, whether it was intentional or accidental. And the NYSAC ruling allowed him to maintain his perfect record. Or does it come down to this: We saw what we saw, and we'll never forget it, drugs or no drugs.

Ring 140-pound champion Teofimo Lopez meets unbeaten contender Arnold Barboza.

Haney wouldn't address the notion that Garcia exposed his limitations, pointing only to the PEDs. His father and trainer, Bill Haney, bristled at the use of the "E" word, particularly because his son refused to stay on the canvas and fought bravely until the end.

"He definitely got exposed," the elder Haney told The Ring, referring to his son. "He was exposed as a warrior. He got back up when a lot of other guys would've jumped through the ropes and gotten out of there. Yeah, he was exposed. He's super talented, tremendously skilled. And he also fights with a lot of heart, like a warrior. In that way, he did get exposed.

"I couldn't be more proud of him. The guy showed he can fight through adversity."

An important question is what that adversity – the brutal knockdowns and embarrassing loss for all the world to see – has taken out of him, if anything.

Some fighters don't bounce back from such a setback. Donald Curry seemed unbeatable until he was stopped by Lloyd Honeyghan in 1986. He was 9-5 the rest of his career and never approached his previous heights. Fernando Vargas was a diminished version of himself after Felix Trinidad beat him up in 2000. The same for Meldrick Taylor after his last-second KO loss to Julio Cesar Chavez in 1990. Naseem Hamed, devastated by his one-sided loss to Marco Antonio Barrera in 2001, fought once more and then retired. The list goes on.

Could Haney suffer a similar fate? Or could he use the setback as a learning experience from which to grow as a fighter?

"Beatings take a little bit from a fighter," said Sergio Mora, a television commentator and former 154-pound titleholder. "Every time a fighter goes through a war, he leaves a little bit of himself in that ring. You hear it all the time in boxing. Devin Haney is not going to get over that embarrassment. Forget the beatdown. The embarrassment that came from that – all those memes, all those tweets, all the social media – this new, young generation, they follow that. That sticks with them. That either brings some fire in him or it could actually affect him."

Haney is saying all the right things – that it took a bigger fighter on PEDs to take him down, that the past is the past, that everything happens for a reason, that he understands the mistakes he made against Garcia.

One error, according to Bill Haney: He allowed the hook in the first round to knock him off his game. He engaged the more powerful Garcia too much after that, intent on returning what he had taken. That, Bill Haney said, played into the opponent's hands. Devin should've done what he does best from beginning to end, which is to box.

That might give fans an idea of what to expect in the second fight, assuming it happens.

"I had to get over it to get better," said Devin. "I had to acknowledge what happened and, you know, at the end of the day realize what my flaws were. There were mistakes I made in the fight that I needed to understand and correct. That's what I'm doing. Like I've said, I'm a better overall fighter and a better person because of this.

"It's in the past. Now I have a new opponent in front of me who is looking to win. So I can't dwell on the past. I have to keep my head up and look ahead."

Ramirez (29-2, 18 KOs) is coming off a close but unanimous decision loss to Arnold Barboza Jr. in November, but he's no pushover. He is a 2012 U.S. Olympian and former unified 140-pound titleholder whose other loss came against a prime Josh Taylor. Bill Haney said Ramirez was chosen because of his similarities to Garcia. He's tall (5-foot-10, an inch taller than Garcia), they both had strong amateur backgrounds, he fights aggressively and he has some punching power. He should also provide an excellent gauge of Haney's mindset after his setback.

Devin Haney understands that fans want to see how he performs after the Garcia debacle.

"I know a lot of people will be watching," he said. "They want to see how I recovered from the Ryan fight, because I took damage in that fight. A lot of people want to see if I'm the same Devin Haney, a better Devin Haney or whatnot. I know I'm better. Now it's up to me to prove that to the world, to the people watching."

Garcia? He initially didn't want a rematch with Haney. His promoter, Oscar De La Hoya, said a second fight wasn't necessary, because the first one was conclusive, even though DeLuca had the fight even.

It's been a year since the first Garcia-Haney fight, enough time for the fighters and their teams to fully digest what happened.

However, he had a change of heart after Haney sued Garcia in September for battery, fraud and breach of contract, citing the performance enhancer. Garcia agreed to the rematch if Haney would drop the suit. The litigation was paused on January 15, after which the parties came to terms on a second fight.

Garcia was unusually subdued at the New York news conference to kick off the May 2 promotion. Host Doug Fischer suggested during a question-and-answer period that there might be bad blood between Garcia and the equally brash Romero (16-2, 13 KOs), with whom he once had a spirited sparring session. Garcia wouldn't bite. Instead, he seemed to acknowledge that, at 26, it might be time to take a different path.

Are we witnessing a new, more mature Ryan Garcia, one who will make weight and fight on a level playing field?

"I'm here to do my job. Set up that rematch," he said. "I'm not overlooking him at all. I know he comes to fight. This is a big opportunity on the main stage. So I have to be sharp and prepared. … I want to be great. I always wanted to fight the best fighters in the sport. As far as my problems outside the ring, I've always had those problems. I don't know who else struggles with that. That's just something I'm struggling with. I want to show everybody that you can come back from anything. I want to show my dedication to the sport and be a true professional.

"I came here to change that. This is the first fight to get respect back and prove to everybody that [the victory over Haney] was no fluke. And I'm ready to do it."

And, of course, he'll be paid handsomely in the process. So will Haney. That's the payoff for both fighters: The drama in and after the first fight will almost certainly lead to gaudy pay-per-view numbers, which could translate to high eight-figure paydays for both men. And if the second fight is compelling, a third fight could potentially make their wallets burst.

Bill Haney would never have agreed to take the first fight with Garcia if he had even an inkling that Garcia had a banned substance in his body. He loves his son. At the same time, facts are facts: A wild fight with a crazy backstory is good business.

That's not lost on the elder Haney, who is also his son's manager. An opportunity to right a wrong and make a fortune at the same time is all the Haneys can ask for.

"We have a strong faith in Allah," he said. "And we know that God makes no mistakes. If we had wiped [Garcia] out [in the first fight], which everyone expected Devin to do, a trilogy wouldn't be on the table right now. I don't think [Devin would] be getting that kind of money, as well. … When things are good, they're good. And when things are bad, they're good.

"And the silver lining is that a lot of the press, a lot of people who now know who Devin is are going to be to see what he does the next time out." RING

THE MORTAL

Nick Laham

IN 2005, **DIEGO CORRALES** AND **JOSE LUIS CASTILLO** PUSHED EACH OTHER BEYOND THE LIMIT OF BELIEF IN WHAT MANY CONSIDER ONE OF THE GREATEST FIGHTS OF ALL TIME

By Bernard Fernandez

It is a major accomplishment for any boxing match to be acclaimed as Fight of the Year by a reputable entity, be it The Ring, the Boxing Writers Association of America or whatever. But how much better does a pairing of two highly skilled, immensely proud and determined combatants have to be to rise to the level of Fight of the Decade? Or, even rarer, Fight of the Century?

The 21st century is only in its 25th year, leaving another 75 open for possibilities. There may be a yet-unfought bout to meet or exceed the breathtakingly epic unification slugfest pitting lightweight titleholders Diego "Chico" Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo against each other on May 7, 2005, at Las Vegas' Mandalay Bay. Already widely acknowledged as the Fight of the Year and, in the opinion of numerous individuals and organizations calculating such things, Fight of the Decade for 2000-2009, perhaps a video of Corrales-Castillo I (they would square off again five months later) should be placed in a time capsule for fight fans of the 22nd century to watch and marvel at. But there would be no rubber match. Tragic circumstances prevented it.

The Corrales-Castillo rivalry, had things worked out more favorably for both, conceivably might have turned into a classic trilogy, to be placed on a pedestal reserved for the likes of Ali-Frazier, Barrera-Morales, Bowe-Holyfield and Zale-Graziano. But perhaps that would have been too much to expect. Much of Corrales' prime existed prior to May 7, 2005, and what remained may have been beaten out of him by those 10 pressure-cooker rounds against Castillo, who floored him twice in that epic final stanza before momentum was dramatically reversed in Chico's favor just seconds later, prompting referee Tony Weeks to step in and wave the bout to a halt.

Corrales fought just three times following his stunning resurgence against Castillo, losing all three, and he might or might not have been dealing with depression at his career downturn when a motorcycle crash snuffed out the remainder of his life at age 29. A 2024 posthumous inductee into the International Boxing Hall of Fame with a 40-5 record that includes 33 wins inside the distance, he left behind a wife, who was six months pregnant at the time, and five children. Castillo fared better following that test by fire with Corrales, going 14-6 in his final 20 bouts to finish 66-13-1 with 57 KOs, but he does not have a plaque hung on a wall in Canastota, New York, and he may never join Corrales in having that honor. He'd been stopped four times in his 59 fights prior to that fateful night, but he had never even been dropped once; he'd be stopped three more times afterward. He retired, unretired and ended his career for good on a five-round pounding from Ruslan Provodnikov – more proof that the fight some consider the most exciting and dramatic of all time drained much of what had made each man special.

No sad postscripts, however, can change what happened that unforgettable night at the Mandalay Bay, when an announced attendance of 5,168 in a room scaled for 6,000 and a Showtime Championship Boxing audience witnessed a test of wills and skills to rival anything ever seen in the sport, before or afterward.

"You can vote now," Gary Shaw, Corrales' now-deceased promoter, said at the post-fight press conference. "This is Fight of the Year, Fight of Next Year, Fight of the Decade. I don't believe you'll ever see anything like this again."

In truth, Corrales-Castillo I had elements of everything that can make certain bouts as exhilarating as anything to be found in the entire spectrum of athletic competition. It had two evenly matched champions (Corrales entered as the WBO lightweight titlist, Castillo as the Ring and WBC 135-pound ruler) at or near the top of their game, more than a touch of controversy and an air of heightened expectation during which both battlers had to dig deep inside themselves to fulfill that promise with absolute purpose.

Even years later, some peripheral observers still speak about what they witnessed up close and personal with the kind of awe that first-time visitors to the Sistine Chapel feel upon seeing the magnificent ceiling art of Michelangelo.

"I knew what type of fighters they were – all heart, all guts, all grit," said Weeks, the third man in the ring for what he still says is the high point of his career and a central player in the controversy that stirred the pot just a bit more. "I knew this fight would be a real tough fight, but never did I dream it would elevate to the level that it did."

Al Bernstein, who did color commentary for the Showtime telecast, said Corrales-Castillo I is the most significant bout of the more than four decades he has been a keen observer of boxing, rating just ahead of the revered April 15, 1985, war in which Marvelous Marvin Hagler retained his middleweight championship by knocking out Thomas Hearns in the third round of what had been nonstop action from the opening bell.

"The reason I would go with Corrales-Castillo I is because it was 3½ times longer, and we got many rounds

The ebb and flow in the Corrales-Castillo showdown was spectacular from start to finish.

Nick Laham

Chico goes all out for the miracle finish in Round 10.

Nick Latham

that were comparable to Round 1 of Hagler-Hearns," Bernstein reasoned.

Even with the fact that stay-at-home viewers could see it on regular Showtime instead of having to pony up for pay-per-view, there were other factors that might have tamped down more widespread appreciation for what was about to go down and explain the less-than-capacity live audience for a presumably 50/50 fight involving two indisputable warriors generally recognized as the best lightweights on the planet. Some of the high-rollers who descend upon Las Vegas like locusts for major fights might have preferred to wait until the following weekend, when Felix Trinidad, a surefire Hall of Famer who had a more prominent name than either Corrales or Castillo, was to swap punches with Winky Wright at the MGM Grand in a WBC middleweight title eliminator that was to be televised by HBO. That scrap, however, yielded more yawns than thrills as Trinidad lost every round on one judge's scorecard and won only one of 12 on the cards submitted by the other two judges. Trinidad fought just one more time before retiring, losing another one-sided decision to Roy Jones Jr.

There was ample reason for the boxing cognoscenti, if the media members who covered the sport can be described as such, to anticipate pugilistic fireworks from Corrales and Castillo. The consensus was that Corrales – taller with a longer reach, and arguably a bigger hitter – would eventually wear down the smaller Castillo and take him out, as he had done in his most recent fight, rallying from an early points deficit to retain his title with a 10th-round stoppage of Brazil's Acelino Freitas. But any advantages that Corrales was thought to have against Castillo were at least somewhat negated, to some observers' thinking, by the fact that he had been knocked down eight times to that point as a pro, including five times in a 10th-round TKO loss to then-WBC 130-pound titleholder Floyd Mayweather Jr. on January 20, 2001. Castillo, a renowned puncher in his own right, was perceived as having the sturdier chin, having gone the distance twice in close decision losses to Mayweather in 2002.

Helping prime the pump for a fight that would have been much anticipated by aficionados in any case was the fact that it was preceded two days earlier by the lavish Boxing Writers Association of America awards dinner, which was being staged in Las Vegas for the first time and drew such high-profile guests as Mayweather, Sugar Ray Leonard, Oscar De La Hoya, Bernard Hopkins, Vitali Klitschko, James Toney, Erik Morales, Chris Byrd and Shane Mosley.

The BWAA had a tie-in with not only the Mandalay Bay but with Showtime Championship Boxing, whose then-executive vice president, Jay Larkin (now deceased), had promised to put another $500,000 into the purse pot for the main event fighters.

It proved to be money well spent. Corrales, in keeping with his more recent reputation as a likable and articulate sort in his dealings with the press, had been trying to scrub clean the taint of being convicted of felony spousal abuse, for which he'd spent 14 months in prison. He spoke respectfully of Castillo in the lead-up to the opening bell, saying, "Everything about Castillo impresses me. He's a consistent, true champion who always finds a way to win. I respect his power, but I'm not concerned about getting knocked down, because I know I'll get up."

That statement proved prophetic, as Corrales seemed to be wearing down, round by round, from Castillo's constant pressure. By the seventh, Corrales' left eye was puffy, purplish and all but closed, to the point that he seemed to not be picking up all of the overhand rights the Mexican standout was landing with regularity. But, given the fact that Corrales was giving as good as he was getting and had a reputation for being at his most dangerous when in trouble, the outcome still appeared to be up for grabs.

Corrales' predicament became far more precarious early in Round 10, when Castillo sent him sprawling to the canvas with a left hook. Corrales' mouthpiece was dislodged by the blow, but it took 23 seconds for trainer Joe Goossen, at Weeks' direction, to clean it off and reinsert it. When the action resumed, Castillo again floored Corrales with a left hook, at which point it appeared that the downed fighter was all but finished. But he bought himself some extra time by intentionally removing his mouthpiece, dropping it and taking his time to pick it up and get to his feet. Weeks deducted a point from Corrales, which was the proper call, but again Corrales gained additional seconds to recover while Goossen rinsed off the mouthpiece and put it back in.

"The first time it came out, it came out by itself," Corrales later acknowledged. "The second time, I took it out to breathe, but I didn't drop it on purpose."

Twenty-eight seconds after going down again, Corrales semi-miraculously flipped the script when he connected with a jarring right hand, the opening salvo of a combination that sent Castillo backward and sagging against the ropes, out on his feet but still not going down. Weeks had no choice but to step in at that point. There were, of course, grumblings from Castillo's promoter, Bob Arum, that Corrales had benefited from the additional time afforded him by the two mouthpiece reinsertions.

THE REAL "FIGHT OF THE CENTURY" REMAINS THE CLASSIC FIRST PAIRING OF DIEGO CORRALES AND JOSE LUIS CASTILLO.

Controversy or not, the fight created indelible memories for those fortunate enough to have seen it. For a look-back story I did years later, I wrote, "Forget the hype. Forget what you were told. Forget even what you know, or think you know. Not to disparage Mayweather-Pacquiao (which took place 10 years later), the undisputed revenue-producing champion of all time. The real 'Fight of the Century' remains the classic first pairing of Diego Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo. Their epic lightweight unification clash was so riveting that many consider it to be the greatest boxing match of all time."

The epilogue, at least for Corrales, proved to be less than glorious. He was kayoed by Castillo in the rematch – though Castillo wasn't even close to making weight, some believe on purpose – then pulled out of a third fight when Castillo came in even more overweight. Corrales failed to make weight himself prior to a split decision loss to Joel Casamayor and then dropped a one-sided decision to Joshua Clottey in a welterweight bout. Perhaps he could have taken some time off and regrouped before attempting a comeback. Whether his frame of mind had been darkened by his three-bout losing streak became the fodder for speculation when, on May 7, 2007 – two years to the day after he and Castillo wrapped themselves in whatever it is that passes for glory inside the ropes – he perished on a Nevada street after his motorcycle crashed into the back of a car and was hurled into oncoming traffic.

Was it a way for Corrales to check out? His blood-alcohol level was far above the legal limit and he'd been charged with driving under the influence more than once before. For some boxers, risk-taking is merely an occupational hazard, part of a job description that by definition entails some degree of personal peril. For others, those who know the rush that can come with staring into the face of disaster and making it blink, it might feel as if they are indestructible, impervious to the possibility of instant tragedy. Courting danger, conquering one's fear in the process, can almost be an aphrodisiac.

Interestingly, in a story that appeared the previous summer in the Las Vegas Review-Journal, Corrales downplayed any notion that he was morose and a danger to himself: "I'm only young once, and unless someone hasn't told me something different, I only get to live once. If I couldn't do this stuff (riding his motorcycle) now, stuff I always wanted to do, I would never get a chance to do it." RING

IN SEARCH OF RECAPTURING A HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE, **JOSEPH PARKER** HAS MORE BULK, MORE STRENGTH, MORE EXPERIENCE AND MORE DESIRE THAN EVER BEFORE

By Gareth A Davies

THE BIG TIME

Richard Pelham; (Right) Maud SAKRI

No matter what Joseph Parker espouses, no matter how exponentially the New Zealander has improved as a fighter, as a purposefully bigger physical specimen or purveyor of self-belief in the ring, no matter how mature the 33-year-old has become as a pugilist, he is still without a world title in his fascinating nine-fight, four-year journey with trainer Andy Lee.

As we assess the athlete at this point in his career, Parker looks to have reached full maturity, with his team members replete in their view that his best two years in the glamour division lie ahead – and within that, an assault on becoming a two-time heavyweight titleholder after losing the WBO belt to Anthony Joshua seven years ago.

There was a period after that in which Parker was dubbed the "nearly man," the "man in the wilderness," the "fighter in limbo" – until his now deeply fruitful relationship with Lee, an alliance within which both men admit to The Ring Magazine that they have both grown in self-belief, in confidence, in their respective roles.

And this recent "limbo" has an altogether different hue.

Indeed, in the world of boxing's business dealings, in the milieu of "realpolitik," Parker, right now, remains philosophical. And he needs to be. Philosophical, ticking over in quasi-camp no matter what, and ready. Ready whenever; ready wherever the call-up may come.

"I FEEL THE BEST I'VE EVER FELT AS A FIGHTER. I FEEL I'VE MATURED AS A FIGHTER. I FEEL I UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M DOING."

Let's be plain about this: In spite of all his current fighting virtues – and they are many – it looks likely that Parker, denied a late-February bid at Daniel Dubois and the IBF title after the fight was canceled at the 11th hour due to Dubois' recurring glandular illness, will be staying on hold and will not have the rescheduled bout with "Dynamite." At press time, Dubois was being transposed into a rematch with Oleksandr Usyk for the undisputed heavyweight crown instead. If not wholly by design, but by opportunity. Realpolitik at its most hard-hitting.

Who knows? This shift may just work out for Parker, the mandatory challenger to the WBO title currently held by Usyk. It would seem that Parker, arguably No. 3 in the world right now (if Tyson Fury counts as "retired" and is out of the listings), will meet the Usyk-Dubois winner. When I spoke to Usyk in Riyadh, ringside at Beterbiev-Bivol 2, dubbed "The Last Crescendo," where he was to see Parker's rapid work against late substitute Martin Bakole and the deft job Agit Kabayel did on Zhilei Zhang, the Ukrainian was adamant that he was "very feel" and keen to be back into camp and fighting again. One man on his lips: Dubois.

So back to the realpolitik. Yes, the biggest fight to be made in the heavyweight division at present, and arguably at a Wembley Stadium or Tottenham Hotspur Stadium-sized venue in London (unless Turki Alalshikh chooses Riyadh), is Usyk-Dubois for all the gold.

Frank Warren, Dubois' Hall of Fame promoter, told me the fight "could be made" around June 2025.

The wheels just need greasing and the juggernaut laden with prizes can be rolled down the hill. The narrative is there: Dubois is improved since they met the first time; he ripped the fighting soul from Anthony Joshua in front of 90,000-plus baying fans at the massive London football stadium, and, indeed, there was plenty of controversy to mull over surrounding the low blow – or disputed low blow – in the Usyk-Dubois first encounter in Poland in August 2023.

The debate raged. Warren raged. Referee Luis Pabon was vilified. I thought the blow was borderline. Bottom line: Dubois was stopped by Usyk, but he looked damn good for five rounds.

Not that long ago, was it? And a lot has happened since then in the land of the heavies. It has felt like time in the division has accelerated. Dubois has risen (similarly to Parker) and Usyk has rubber-stamped himself as the best of this era in two weight divisions with those two compelling chess matches against Tyson Fury in 2024.

Usyk has had tough assignments since then; Dubois has come into his own. So the fight, regardless of a meritocracy involving Parker, makes sense in boxing/business terms.

So where does that leave conquering hero Parker? Let's just go back over the events in the fight week of The Last Crescendo, when a late illness and late-night dash across continents saved the day.

Dubois fell ill, was examined by Dr. Neil Scott, the chief medical officer of the British Boxing Board of Control, and was extracted by officialdom from the event. Of that there is no dispute, and I have been over it both with Warren and Robert Smith, general secretary of the BBBofC, in detail.

Warren, indeed, says that conspiracy theorists can "fuck off. Quote me on that. They are morons ... Daniel was ill. The doctor pulled him out."

The illness is indisputable. It came over Dubois on Wednesday night/Thursday morning, and medical chiefs made the decision. It is not the first time it has happened to Dubois, either, I am told.

Regardless, after a rapid reshuffle, in stepped Bakole 48 hours before the fight, subsequently enduring a sojourn on two flights from Congo via Ethiopia. Weighing 310 pounds, Bakole was game, if not in shape, and even managed a few

mark robinson

Parker's weapon of choice against Bakole was a booming overhand right.

media interviews on arrival very late in the day on Friday. Above and beyond. But one of the most avoided fighters in the division, ranked No. 7 by The Ring Magazine, went home well-rewarded financially.

Bakole stepped into the ring for the penultimate fight in the wee hours of Sunday morning and was dispatched by a big right hand from Parker in Round 2. Let's not undermine what either man did. But Parker got the job done. Clean.

Mark my words: There was still huge interest in the contest. There were spikes on social media when the fight took place.

The Parker team knew that Bakole carried dangers. Both deserve great respect for agreeing to the fight on late, late notice.

A few days after the dust had settled and Parker had returned to New Zealand, I caught up with him on the phone.

What did he want to do next?

Parker was pensive. "What do I want to do next? I would love to fight Daniel Dubois for the IBF championship of the world – or to fight Usyk for the other belts. That would be awesome or amazing if I had the opportunity to fight one of those guys. I'm not sure if it could happen or it will happen, but in an ideal world that would be golden for me. It's mostly what I want."

Of course. It has to be the ultimate aim. But Parker was certainly delighted with his night's work.

"After the victory over Martin Bakole, I felt very happy. I felt very excited about the result and how we finished the fight. Look, he came in at the last minute, but I was very grateful to be on the card and still to be able to fight. But a lot of credit goes to Martin Bakole for stepping up, and a lot of credit goes to our team for taking the fight at late notice. It is always a risky fight with someone like Martin. But a great result from our side."

There is little doubt that Parker feels very mature now. Bigger, too. In pursuit of his best, he has undergone "an experiment," according to Lee, who told me it has turned Parker into a bigger, stronger and harder-punching fighter. It is a fascinating process.

When Parker defeated Zhang in

their March 2024 fight in Riyadh, he weighed 247½ pounds while Zhang weighed 291½ pounds. Parker won the fight by a majority decision but was knocked down in the third and eighth rounds before recovering to use his speed and mobility to outbox his Chinese opponent.

A triumvirate of Parker, Lee (also Tyson Fury's former assistant trainer) and George Lockhart, an American performance nutritionist, chef and strength and conditioning coach, sat around a table and hatched a plan last year: They would build Parker into a much bigger athlete.

"The reason was to maximize his size and power without sacrificing Joe's mobility and speed," Lee has told me. "George is a brilliant expert on the human body and getting an athlete to the optimum weight."

Lockhart drew up the program, putting Parker on 10,000 calories a day for a six-week period, then set a powerful workout process of weightlifting, allied with endurance training.

His weight against Bakole: 267 pounds.

"We worked on strengthening and building from the base upwards: his calves, quads, glutes, back and shoulders, then arms. It involved a huge amount of strength work, but never compromising his athletic needs as a boxer. We wanted him to be heavier and stronger – but still as fast. And as he built, his power increased. It went in phases.

"Strength first, with heavy weights, squats, leg presses and dumbbells. We were building muscle the entire time, and so it increased his weight."

Parker told The Ring: "I feel the best I've ever felt as a fighter. I feel I've matured as a fighter. I feel I understand what I'm doing. And with every training session, every meal, everything we do, we do it with purpose, and I do feel the best I've ever felt in my career. Because of all those things and also because I'm enjoying my work every single day. I'm ready for anything."

It certainly seemed that way against Bakole. "The relationship with my team is special – I have a great relationship with Andy, George, [manager] Spencer Brown and David Higgins and, for that matter, everyone else, including my brother, cousin, family and friends. They all work hard to get me into the best shape of my life for every fight.

"And Frank Warren as well … we have a great contract with Frank, and we know he will get us the best fights out there. Onwards and upwards in what we do."

Parker earned a reported $3.5 million for his fight with Bakole. Brown told me that he is "happy for Joe to keep his powder dry" for a while, if he wishes. For his part, Parker has declared he is "ready for anyone in the division."

Also Fury's manager and head of Goldstar Promotions, Brown has become a very influential figure, mostly behind the scenes. He told me that it was "Tyson Fury who put us all together with Joe [Parker]. I will be asking Turki [Alalshikh] to get Joe to where he should be. But fair play to Turki. He kept that fight on, and he got Bakole there. Andy Lee was in agreement on taking the fight.

"The decision on what Joe does next will be collective, but Andy needs to be happy with it. But I want him to fight for a world title, if I'm honest … and Joe has never looked better, has he?"

Lee shares the same view. Not based on realpolitik, but on meritocracy. "We've had nine fights working together, and we are 8-1 since May 2021, the first Derek Chisora fight," Lee explained. "He's growing by the fight and every day in training in the camps. I wouldn't call it maturing, even. His belief, his image of himself, his inner dialogue reflects that he knows he is one of the best heavyweights in the world. That's how he thinks and conducts himself. He truly knows it and believes it."

This is very different from when they first met. "I can't remember that time in detail, because we were both different," said Lee. "We have grown together as a coach and a fighter. I have developed as he has. My convictions have grown; I've always believed in what I wanted, but now I know I am making the right decisions, the big decisions on who, where, when you are fighting … there's a time when you ask if it's right.

"How can I say it … I know boxing. I've lived and breathed it my whole life. Things I've said about boxers and opponents have eventually come true. I've learned to back myself, even though you still agonize over decisions … but those decisions seem to be right."

This is maturity – and Lee recognizing it. Moreover, he is recognizing it through the synergy he has enjoyed with Parker.

Then Lee, abruptly, checks himself. "But back to Joe. It was a building job. When I look back, we were unfortunate to fight Joe Joyce when we did, Joseph was ill – irrelevant now. It was a bad style matchup at the time. It was delayed three or four times. We were on a progression … but we started from scratch again after that fight."

Since then, six victories on the bounce. Deontay Wilder, Zhang, now Bakole: "Three KOs, three going the distance against some of the very best heavyweights in the world. His confidence has been gained and garnered after his performances in the ring, and the proof is in the pudding."

Lee goes deeper here on Parker's standing, in his view: "Joseph Parker is no longer an experiment. He's routinely walking around at 121kg (267 pounds) … that's his body now. He's not the tallest heavyweight, so we needed to maximize his physique to get the edge where we can. It's a game of fine margins. You saw that punch where he knocked Martin Bakole out. He didn't knock Bakole out because Bakole got off a flight and was exhausted after six or seven rounds. Bakole was fresh coming into the fight and was looking very good in that opening round. He was making a fight of it in the second round, and Joe realized, 'I need to do something here.' And he unleashed that punch – and it was a game-changer.

"HIS CONFIDENCE HAS BEEN GAINED AND GARNERED AFTER HIS PERFORMANCES IN THE RING, AND THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING."

"We don't want Joe going to decisions all the time. It's why we built him bigger. This is a different Joseph Parker, completely different as a fighter, technically and physically. But also as a man a lot more mature, a lot more determined. He knows how close he is to becoming a two-time heavyweight world champion and an all-time great."

A powerful mindset from Parker and his esteemed entourage. They are few, but they are formidable.

But the title still eludes them. "We were two days away from fighting for it, but at The Last Crescendo we felt in the camp it was like Joe beat two opponents in one fight," said Lee. "He beat Bakole and Dubois … that is how it feels to us.

"You would not believe the reaction he got from people after he took the Bakole fight. People went crazy for him. [But] he's a humble guy. Joe is such a humble, genuine, caring person. He gives his time for people, does things for people financially around him.

"He's such a good person, and that came across in the YouTube series he did – 14 episodes in camp in Ireland, and in the Saudi fight weeks. He has so much support; he's there in terms of recognition, and he's even ahead of Dubois in terms of recognition. Again, in my view. OK, Dubois had the great win against Joshua and that definitely got people's attention, but for household names: Tyson No. 1, Joshua No. 2, maybe Usyk and Joe level in third.

"I don't need to keep Joe match-ready. Joe never goes out of shape now. He always ticks over, and he has our absolute belief. And in my view, it should be a world title shot next. That's what I want for Joe. And it's what he deserves."

Strong words from Lee. But the final word goes to the fighter himself. Parker is at home, his children busy in the background, as he tells me before the phone call closes: "I'm patient, but ready. I'm ready for the call … anytime, any place, anywhere. My goal is to become champion again, and believe me, I'm ready." RING

Gareth A Davies is the boxing correspondent for Talksport and the Sunday and Daily Telegraph newspaper in London.

Ring IQ got Parker over the line against the gigantic Zhang.

Richard Pelham

A MONSTER'S PASSION

NAOYA INOUE HAS CONQUERED FOUR DIVISIONS, SUMMITED THE POUND-FOR-POUND MOUNTAIN AND GAINED STARDOM IN HIS AWESTRUCK NATION, BUT HE SAYS A LOVE OF BOXING IS STILL PUSHING HIM TO ACHIEVE MORE

By Daisuke Sugiura

On February 24 at Ohashi Gym in Yokohama, Japan, the author sat down for an exclusive interview with undisputed junior featherweight champion Naoya Inoue (29-0, 26 KOs). Due to Inoue's wishes and the author's schedule, the conversation was coincidentally set for the afternoon of Junto Nakatani's latest bantamweight title defense against David Cuellar. An inevitable fight between the two Japanese warriors is widely seen as one of the most explosive matchups in boxing – one that could send tremors through the pound-for-pound list.

Illustration by Chris Wormell

During the hour-long interview, Inoue, a two-division Ring champion with a deep respect for the magazine, spoke seriously and at times with a smile about his past, present and future. "The Monster" carefully outlined his career plans, spoke about his rivals in other weight classes and even mused about when he might retire.

The Ring: First of all, I'd like you to look back on your latest fight against Ye-Joon Kim (a fourth-round knockout win for Inoue), which had a lot going on before it happened. Do you view it now as a good experience?
Naoya Inoue: I've come up with a new way to prepare, or a plan to get myself in shape in two months. Normally I'd do it over about four or five weeks, but this time, because of the postponement, I had to prepare over a long span of eight weeks. That's something I've never done before.

Ring: The fight was postponed [11 days before the original date] due to an injury to Sam Goodman, and then Goodman was injured again, so Kim was brought in as a replacement [on two weeks' notice]. Did you have to repeat the peaking process that was done once?
Inoue: After the postponement was announced, I ate some food for about 10 days but kept training. Although I stopped adjusting my weight for 10 days, I didn't gain any fat, so the burden on my body from conditioning and losing weight continued as it was. So it wasn't easy, for sure.

Ring: Mr. Hideyuki Ohashi (the chairman of Ohashi Gym) said that when he told you about the postponement, you looked completely unconcerned. But how did you really feel?
Inoue: At that time, there was nothing I could do, and I didn't think there was any need to cancel the fight, so I just had to accept it. When I heard about Goodman's injury, I thought it would be fine if we postponed for a month. It was also decided at that point that we would have a substitute fighter in case of another accident. However, I never thought I would actually fight Kim, who was the substitute. I hardly watched any film of Kim. Still, I thought I fought well, so I think it was a good experience in the end.

Ring: Is there any change to the plan to fight four times in 2025, starting with the Kim bout?
Inoue: No change. I plan to fight in January, May, September and December.

Ring: You'd have six fights over the two years from 2024 to 2025, and that is a pretty high pace in modern boxing. Aren't you concerned about the strain it will put on your body?
Inoue: There is no need to worry about the strain, and there are no mental anxieties either. I think that I can do this now, because I'm at the top. If it becomes difficult for me physically or due to age, I think that three or four fights a year will be too much, so I want to do it now while I can.

Ring: Your next fight is scheduled for May in Las Vegas. After two fights in Vegas in 2020-21, you mentioned that you would like to fight in Japan again. With your recent string of fights in Japan, are you starting to feel attracted to fighting overseas again?
Inoue: The reason I chose Japan as my battlefield at that time was that the pandemic had calmed down, and at the same time, the streaming market in Japan had been established enough to allow important fights to be held. The reason my predecessors in the boxing world once pursued the American Dream was because they could have a big fight if they beat a good opponent or two in America. However, in modern times, Japan has become the epicenter for the lower weight classes. One of the reasons I decided to fight in Las Vegas again was I was offered a good deal. I could feel respected, too.

Ring: You've already made a lot of money, but as a professional and a pioneer of Japanese boxers active on the world stage, I imagine you'd like to continue looking for suitable deals in the future.
Inoue: As long as I am doing boxing as a profession, I want to be particular about that in a good way. It's the same for people who do any job, not just boxing. I think that the motivation of businessmen changes depending on the contract. As a professional fighter, I want to pursue a contract that allows me to be properly valued.

Ring: As you mentioned earlier, your last fight in Las Vegas was held during the pandemic. Looking back at that time, what do you remember?
Inoue: The Jason Moloney fight was held in a true "bubble" environment. All members of the camp were tested when moving around the hotel, and only those who tested negative were allowed to pass through. I really felt that we had to fight COVID mentally as well. However, I remember that by the time of the Michael Dasmarinas fight, the restrictions had been eased considerably, and there were many more opportunities to go outside.

Ring: While reporting from inside the bubble, we media also felt scared every time we had a test. When I got a call from the front desk, I was terrified that I had tested positive. (laughs)
Inoue: I was scared too! I was worried that I might not be able to fight. (laughs) That was the most memorable thing about the Moloney fight. I think everyone was more focused on how to spend their time in the bubble than on the fight itself.

Ring: Did you know that the date of your next fight is the Mexican holiday Cinco de Mayo? How happy are you to take over the baton of the Las Vegas event that has been handed down from the days of Oscar De La Hoya and Floyd Mayweather?
Inoue: I don't know the details or the background of Cinco de Mayo, but I knew that Saul "Canelo" Alvarez has been fighting at that time every year. Of course I'm happy. It looks like my fight will be held at a large venue called T-Mobile Arena, so I'm a little worried about whether the seats will be filled. It's a shame that I can't fight David Picasso, who is popular in Mexico, but I still want to make it an exciting event.

Naoki Fukuda

Inoue consistently caught Ye Joon Kim cleanly and ended matters quickly.

Ring: At the end of last year, you made a big splash by signing a sponsorship contract with the Saudi Arabian "Riyadh Season." Heavyweight fighters are often featured in Saudi, so did it mean anything to you, the 122-pound champion, to be recognized in this way?
Inoue: I think it was a very valuable thing. I wonder if this contract shows that what I have done so far has been appreciated. I think the presence of the Riyadh Season in Saudi Arabia will become even bigger in the boxing world. There is a possibility that their boxing series will become even bigger from now on.

Ring: What was your impression when you actually met Turki Alalshikh?
Inoue: He seemed to be a real boxing fan who loves boxing. As we listened to him, he started talking about who he wanted to see fight against who, and I could feel his passion to see the best against the best.

Ring: After already achieving almost everything a boxer can achieve, where is the motivation now? What drives Naoya Inoue?
Inoue: I don't know if there is a reason that makes me so excited, but I think the biggest reason I keep fighting is that I just love boxing. I don't find training difficult at all, and I feel like I still have room to grow and get stronger.

Ring: You really like boxing, don't you?
Inoue: I love it. (laughs) If I lost that feeling, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't have any regrets if I quit boxing now. I don't wake up in the morning and feel like I don't want to go training. I also feel that my fans still have high expectations of me, and of course I want to impress them with my performance.

Ring: Even with such an impressive career under your belt, what makes boxing so enjoyable?
Inoue: Boxing is a deep sport, so I still feel like I'm discovering new things. It's just a feeling that I'm evolving through experience, and I'm getting better. Of course, in terms of physical strength, reflexes, reactions, etc., there will be things that cannot be resisted by age. I want to be conscious of not losing those parts and add to them and improve as I gain more experience.

Ring: You've said before that as you've gotten older, you've started to think first in the ring calmly and then attack.
Inoue: Indeed. In my last fight against Kim, if I was younger, I would have gone all out from the first round. But recently, I've been focusing on

checking things one by one and working on them. People say that I've had fewer devastating KOs since I moved up to junior featherweight and that there's a wall in the weight class, but I've won all my fights by KO at 122 pounds. I don't feel like there's a wall. It's just that my own plan and approach have changed.

Ring: I thought your KO victory over Kim was pretty devastating too.
Inoue: I guess fans have become a bit numb to the idea of me winning.

Ring: Will the Murodjon Akhmadaliev fight happen in September?
Inoue: I'm supposed to fight him in Nagoya in September, and I'm really looking forward to it. When I fight against such strong fighters, I can bring out the best in myself and bring out the power I never imagined. I expect to do unexpected things in the moment.

Ring: Your best fights so far have been against Omar Narvaez, Juan Carlos Payano, the Nonito Donaire rematch and Stephen Fulton – all highly touted opponents. Is Akhmadaliev that good too?
Inoue: I think Akhmadaliev is a fighter of that level.

Ring: Are you aware of the ongoing trash talk from Akhmadaliev and promoter Eddie Hearn?
Inoue: Yes, I want to tell them to calm down, because we will fight eventually. (laughs) I'm not that worried about it, though.

Ring: And are you expecting to fight Nick Ball at 126 pounds at the end of the year?
Inoue: If I win in May and September, and Nick Ball beats TJ Doheny, then the fight will take place in December in Saudi Arabia. I've seen highlights of Ball fighting. I don't dislike fighting aggressive fighters like him at all. On the contrary, I find it more bothersome when my opponents use their footwork.

Ring: Are you concerned about the physical strength of the featherweight fighters?
Inoue: Ball is a fighter who has used his physical strength as a weapon. But he's not tall, and in fact he's smaller than me. So maybe he's not a natural featherweight. Still, he's a guy who has risen in the featherweight division by defeating bigger opponents, so I think it will be a fun fight.

Ring: Mr. Ohashi mentioned your plan to move up to featherweight once and then return to junior featherweight next year. Will that be another challenge?
Inoue: Now that's a new challenge. If I succeed in such a challenge, I think it will be a path that no other Japanese person has ever taken.

Ring: If you return to 122 pounds next year, will you face Junto Nakatani?
Inoue: Yes, that's the plan.

Ring: You are probably asked about Nakatani often nowadays, and I think you are high on him too.
Inoue: He's very good. He's tall and powerful. From what I've seen of his boxing, I think he's also very smart, and he's a good fighter. However, he hasn't had any big fights or intense battles yet. Considering his future, I think his lack of experience in intense fights is a cause for concern. Aside from that, I think he's a strong fighter.

Ring: Nakatani also has a lot of respect for you and has repeatedly said that he still needs to build up his resume. Are you happy that such a highly regarded fighter is coming out of Japan and that there is a possibility that you will have a big fight in your home country?
Inoue: I'm certainly happy about it and looking forward to it. However, there's still a year until the day we're trying to make the fight happen. As good as he is, that fight is not the goal of my boxing career. If it happens in May of next year, great, I'm all for it. If it doesn't, I don't intend to keep waiting at 122 pounds.

Ring: In your boxing career, have you ever felt rivalry with any fighter?
Inoue: Even going back to my childhood, there was no fighter who I felt a sense of rivalry with. It depends on your point of view. Manny Pacquiao once had rivals such as Juan Manuel Marquez, Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales, but if Pacquiao had easily won the first fight against those fighters, they would not have been considered rivals. If I had fought a fierce battle against Fulton like the first fight between Fulton and Brandon Figueroa, the second fight might have happened, and we might have become rivals. Pacquiao's rivals were legends, so I don't mean to put them down, but what I'm saying is I see opinions that there are no strong fighters in my era and in my weight classes. I don't know if that's true or not.

Ring: Maybe you just have been so much better than everyone else in your weight classes.
Inoue: I'd like to believe that, of course.

Ring: So, even if they weren't your rivals, do you ever wish there were more big names in your weight class? Nonito Donaire was a big name, though.
Inoue: I think Donaire wasn't in his prime. I don't know, but maybe it was bad timing; other fighters, like Roman Gonzalez, changed weight classes. But there's nothing I can do about that. There was a time when the junior bantamweight class had a lot of strong fighters, so in that sense I may not have been blessed with the times. If you ask me who, I'm not that knowledgeable about boxing, so I don't know about past fighters, but I would have liked to fight in the days when there were plenty

The destruction of Kim was Inoue's eighth straight fight on Japanese soil.

Naoki Fukuda

of big names in my weights.

Ring: There are some voices in the U.S. calling for a fight with [115-pound Ring/WBC champion] Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez. What do you think of him?
Inoue: I think he's a good fighter. I'm pushing myself a little bit to move up to junior featherweight, but I don't think my frame is that different from his. I think a fight isn't impossible at all. It depends on the timing, and I'm not waiting for Rodriguez to move up.

Ring: If Rodriguez moves up to 122 pounds, there's a possibility that you could fight him?
Inoue: I definitely think he'll be one of the candidates. I don't think it's a fantasy.

Ring: He's still young, but what makes him so good?
Inoue: He has a very good sense of distance. He's not a particularly powerful puncher, and I wouldn't say he's extremely fast. I like his movement and the way he punches with good timing, and I get the impression that he knows how to create the best distance for himself. I've only seen him fight against Juan Estrada, but I was impressed.

Ring: Looking at the current featherweight division, who do you know?
Inoue: Wouldn't it be exciting to have the rematch with Fulton in Las Vegas? Fulton came to Japan for the previous fight. With that background, I think it would be an interesting idea for me to go to Vegas and challenge Fulton again at featherweight.

Ring: Since you had an almost flawless win, I thought it might be difficult to motivate yourself mentally to fight Fulton again. But that's not the case?
Inoue: Not really. There are some different elements from the last time, such as "126 pounds" and "Las Vegas." I think the result would have been similar even if the first fight had been in the U.S. However, I think Fulton is probably better suited for featherweight, so I think it will be an interesting fight in that sense.

"Boxing is a deep sport, so I still feel like I'm discovering new things."

Ring: What about WBO titleholder Rafael Espinoza?
Inoue: I've only watched Espinoza's fight against Robeisy Ramirez. His height is impressive. I saw him only once, so I can't say for sure, but I think he's using his size as a weapon.

Ring: I've asked you this before, but is featherweight your ceiling?
Inoue: Yes, featherweight is my limit. I'm not interested in going any higher. If I were over 170 cm (5-foot-7) tall, it would be different, but there is a limit to how much of a body I can build, frame-wise. Even at junior featherweight, I'm building muscle one by one, building up my physique and taking on the challenge. I haven't even tried featherweight yet, so I can't think about going any higher than that.

Ring: You mentioned that it's important for you to perform at your best. You feel that featherweight is the limit to build a physique that you're satisfied with.
Inoue: For me, featherweight is already too big, and I think 122 pounds is suitable. That said, when I was at 118 pounds, I said "bantamweight is best for me." But now, junior featherweight is comfortable, so I don't know what will happen if I move up to featherweight. But that's what I'm thinking right now.

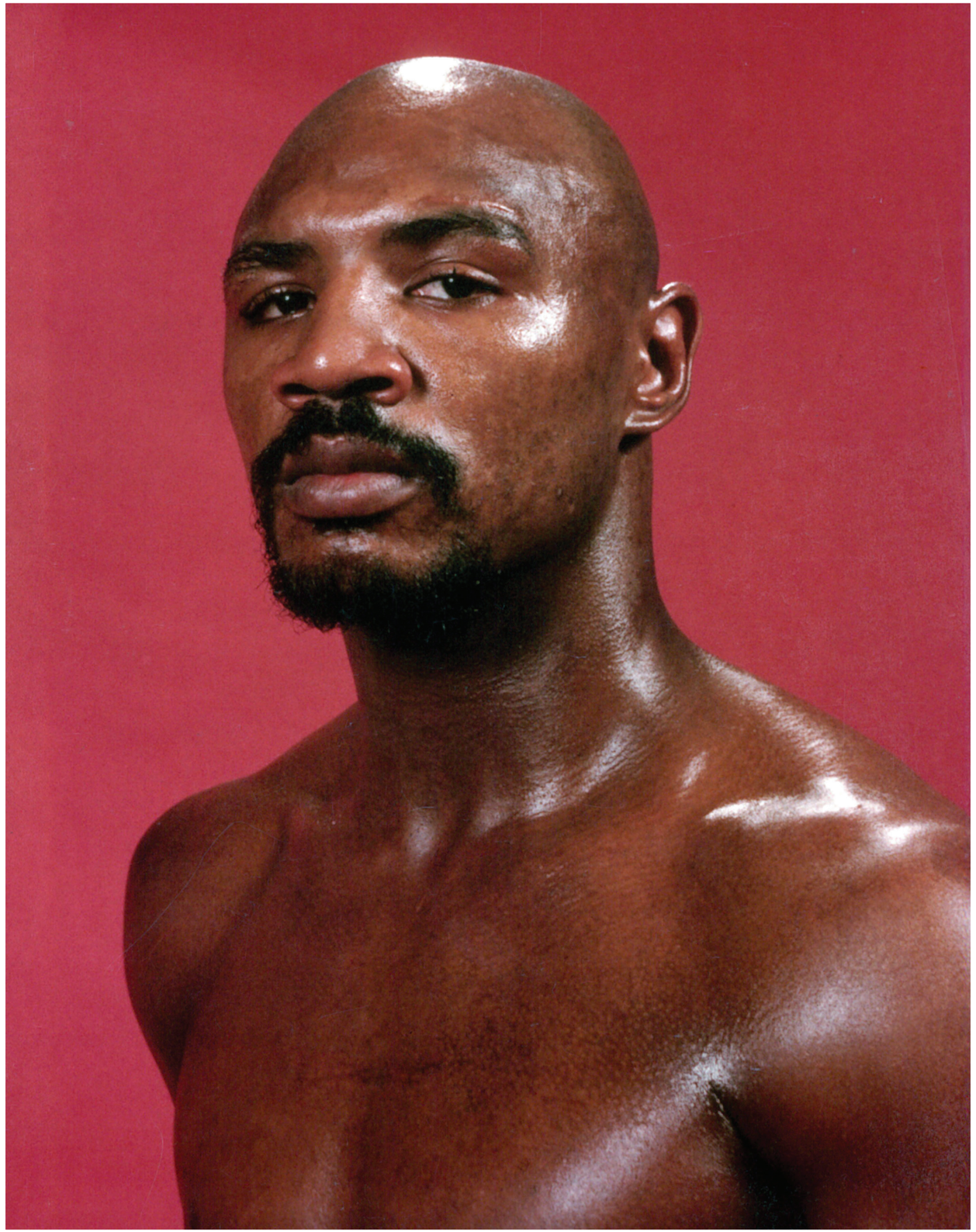
Ring: You're still performing at an extremely high level, but is the end in your sight?
Inoue: I will be 32 in April. I don't feel any decline in my physical strength or performance yet, but I'm sure that someday that day will come. I have to plan my training and fights with that in my mind. As a human being, I'm sure I will inevitably decline, so I think it's important to prepare and to know myself.

Ring: Some fighters fight until they're worn out, while others stop at the top. Do you prefer to finish your career at the top? How many more years do you think you'll be an active fighter?
Inoue: I want to close my fighting career when the time is right. I think I have about three years left, including this year.

Ring: Has your desire to be involved in boxing even after your retirement changed?
Inoue: My desire to carry on what Mr. Ohashi built hasn't changed. Mr. Ohashi doesn't have any children. I'd like to hear what he wants to do with Ohashi Gym and Promotions, but when I told him when we had dinner that I wanted to take it over, he looked so happy. RING

Naoki Fukuda

Heavily muscled at 122 pounds, Inoue insists that featherweight will be his final division.



A MARVELOUS LEGACY

WELL BEFORE HIS VICTORY OVER THOMAS HEARNS STAMPED A DEFINING MOMENT IN OUR COLLECTIVE MIND, **MARVIN HAGLER** HAD BEEN ASSEMBLING A CAREER TO RIVAL THE GREATEST MIDDLEWEIGHTS OF ALL TIME

By Lee Groves

Long before Marvelous Marvin Hagler stepped inside the ring against Thomas Hearns, even the most hard-bitten observers acknowledged he was one of the best middleweight champions ever to walk the earth. But his signature effort against Hearns proved beyond doubt that he was worthy of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the immortals.

By smashing "The Hitman" to bits in less than three rounds, Hagler showed his remaining critics the entirety of his fistic character. Everyone knew he had been the consummate boxer-puncher, but against Hearns he unleashed the fire that had burned within him for years. He willingly ran toward the cannon that was Hearns' crippling right cross. He unflinchingly fought through the blood that obscured his vision. And, moments after referee Richard Steele called for the ringside physician to examine the cut that had created that blood, Hagler, sensing his precious title reign was in danger of ending, reacted the way a genuinely great champion would: He instantly shifted into an even higher gear, staggered Hearns with a wide-arcing overhand right, then put him flat on his back.

This was not the Hagler who treated Roberto Duran so respectfully that he nearly lost the championship on points. This Hagler was bold, confident, commanding and vicious. On that night, Hagler embodied his motto of "Destruct and Destroy" as well as every asset revered by fans, media and historians. Moreover, the Hearns performance prompted observers to view him in a different light. Yes, he was talented, but the violent and dramatic nature of his triumph brought into sharp focus his longevity, versatility and intangibles.

His effort earned him a Ring Magazine trifecta – Fight of the Year, Round of the Year and Fighter of the Year. Even so, he had to share the latter award with Donald Curry, and, at least for a while, many envisioned an eventual match between them. Curry's shocking loss to Lloyd Honeyghan in September 1986 snuffed out any hopes of turning that dream fight into a reality.

The Hearns victory also enhanced Hagler's standing as a mainstream star as he appeared in commercials and on talk shows, and it paved the way for later honors as well. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1993, his first year of eligibility, and was also enshrined by the World Boxing Hall of Fame along with several state-level entities. He was twice honored as Fighter of the Year by Ring and the Boxing Writers Association of America. The disputed loss to Sugar Ray Leonard two years later had no effect on Hagler's aura; in fact, it enhanced it. Hagler always believed boxing's establishment was against him, and to many, the Leonard verdict proved his point. He earned even more respect by announcing his retirement in June 1988 and sticking to it despite being offered millions to make a comeback. He was one of the "Four Kings" as defined by author George Kimball, and though he lost to Leonard, Hagler would get many votes as being the greatest of the group.

Just how marvelous was "The Marvelous One" in terms of middleweight history? It depends on which angle one wishes to address. One would examine the entirety of fighters who have ever competed in the 160-pound division, including the legends of other weight classes who happened to win a belt, such as Leonard, Hearns, Duran and Roy Jones Jr. (who made only one defense and remained IBF titleholder for nearly 18 months), or those who campaigned at middleweight but never secured their deserved shot for reasons beyond their control. Examples of the latter category include Archie

The great Hagler in action against Vito Antuofermo (left, in their first encounter) and Britain's Alan Minter.

Marvelous reigned supreme in career-defining superfights against Roberto Duran (left) and Thomas Hearns.

Hearns: Manny Millan; Duran: John Iacono

Moore (who was in and out of the Ring middleweight ratings between 1940-1944, including first in the July 1940 issue), Charley Burley, Holman Williams, Cocoa Kid, Eddie Booker and Lloyd Marshall, among others. The other angle – the one that will be used here – is to compare Hagler to those who made a historic mark on the division either in terms of championship pedigree or notching a notable number of wins over excellent opposition.

Should Hagler be included on the middleweight Mount Rushmore? Does he occupy a spot slightly outside the top four? Or does he stand near the summit, if not atop it? The following paragraphs will examine Hagler from several perspectives that hopefully will pinpoint his place in the pantheon.

Physical Assets: At 5-foot-8, he was of average height for his weight class but on the shorter side compared to his peers. He was one inch taller than Mickey Walker, a half-inch taller than Tony Zale, and was the same height as Harry Greb and Jake LaMotta, the latter of whom notched only two successful defenses but was among the best 160-pounders for several years. But Hagler was one inch shorter than Stanley Ketchel, two inches shorter than the highly underrated Freddie Steele and Tiger Flowers, two and a half inches shorter than Gennadiy Golovkin, and three inches shorter than Sugar Ray Robinson. Carlos Monzon and Bob Fitzsimmons were 5-foot-11½ while Bernard Hopkins was (and still is) a willowy 6-foot-1. As a point of comparison, today's titleholders stand 5-foot-9 (Erislandy Lara), 5-foot-11 (Carlos Adames) and 5-foot-11½ (Zhanibek Alimkhanuly).

That said, while Hagler was on the shorter side in terms of height, BoxRec.com credits him with a 75-inch wingspan, one that far exceeds those of Walker and LaMotta (67 inches) and was longer than that of Zale (69 inches), Ketchel (70 inches), Golovkin (70 inches), Greb (71 inches), Fitzsimmons (71½ inches), Steele (72 inches) and Robinson (72½ inches). Hagler's figure – which is identical to Hopkins' – is only exceeded by Flowers and Monzon (76 inches) in this group. As for today's titleholders, Alimkhanuly's is 71½ inches, Adames' is 73 and Lara's is 75. Because Hagler's reach was abnormally long for a man of his height, he created an optical illusion for his opponents: Just when they thought they were out of range, Hagler was able to strike them with speed and precision.

Hagler's physique was trim yet muscular; he was seemingly carved from marble, and he always stepped into the ring in exquisite condition. However, there were initial questions about his ability to remain strong over an entire world title contest; Hagler's energy ebbed just enough in the late stages of his first 15-round championship fight to allow Vito Antuofermo's rally to lift the champ into a controversial title-retaining draw. Hagler's all-out effort in the final two rounds of the Duran fight nearly four years later showed he had improved his pacing, and he consolidated that belief by scoring subsequent late-round stoppages over Juan Domingo Roldan (KO 10) and John Mugabi (KO 11).

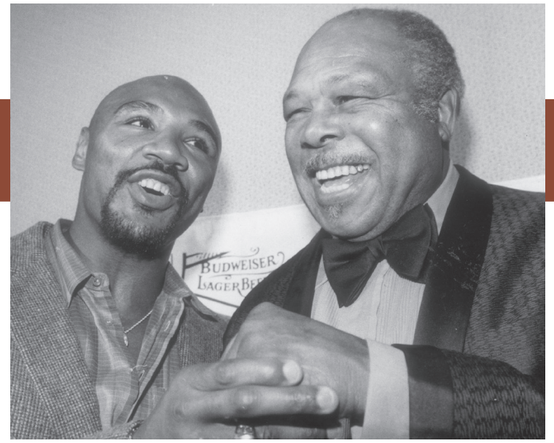
In terms of his presence, Hagler was literally drawn from central casting, both in terms of his boxing career and his post-boxing life as an actor. His "look" and his identity were unmistakable; his sculpted physique, shaved head, goatee and pugnacious temperament (in the lead-up to his matches as well as inside the ring) were menace personified. He never lost a staredown, and if he wanted to be left alone, a single look was the only deterrent he needed.

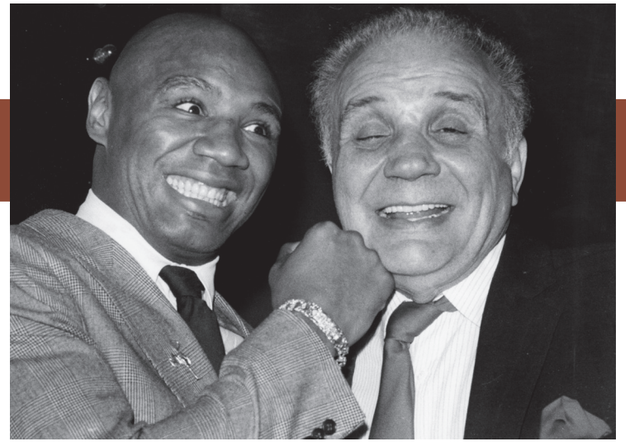
On a side note, Hagler wasn't alone as far as pursuing careers that occupied space far beyond boxing. Robinson famously interrupted his boxing career to become a song-and-dance man, and he also financed a wide swath of businesses in Harlem. During his heavyweight title reign, Fitzsimmons, following the precedent established by predecessors John L. Sullivan and James J. Corbett, participated in stage plays, and after he lost the title to James J. Jeffries, he published a book entitled *Physical Culture and Self-Defense*. LaMotta was a stage actor, a comedian and a bar manager. Steele performed as a boxing double for Errol Flynn in the 1942 movie *Gentleman Jim* and appeared in nearly 30 films before shifting to the restaurant business. Walker became an accomplished painter and operated his own restaurant. Hopkins has advised many fighters to invest in real estate, as he has done. Zale was originally cast to play himself in the Rocky Graziano biopic "Somebody Up There Likes Me," but according to Robert Wise's book of the same title, Paul Newman, who portrayed Graziano, was concerned during rehearsals that the former champion would reflexively hit him too hard. For this reason, Zale was replaced with actor Court Shepard.

Talent: Hagler is considered one of history's greatest switch-hitters because of the fluidity and effectiveness he displayed from both stances. Although he was a natural right-hander, Hagler operated most comfortably as a southpaw, and because of his natural right-handedness, his jab was a powerful and precise weapon. If one wishes to assess Hagler at his zenith, watch his sixth-round TKO of Tony Sibson in 1983. He dismantled his mandatory challenger with knifing jabs that connected with almost unerring accuracy, used his lively legs to easily maneuver around the Briton, then smoothly shifted into knockout mode – a mode that produced two knockdowns in what was the final round. While Robinson was highly gifted, Hagler may well have been the most versatile operator among the middleweights and one of the best multidimensional fighters of all time. It can be argued that had Hagler-Leonard taken place in 1983, "The Marvelous One" not only would have been the betting favorite, he may well have scored the knockout expected of him in April 1987, because he had enough technical skill to box with Sugar Ray while also possessing the natural middleweight power Leonard didn't yet have.

At his best, Hagler fought behind a bladed stance, used his legs to maintain his preferred distance in any situation, and applied his ring IQ to score points and set up knockout punches executed with either hand. Hagler was an efficient finisher, and although he was vulnerable to eye cuts, Hagler owned a rock-solid chin. In 67 fights, he suffered only one official knockdown, but that opening-round slip against Roldan is almost universally discounted. Hagler may not have been a marquee blue-chip prospect like Leonard was, but his hard work, his willingness to challenge himself, his supreme focus and his burning ambition served to amplify his natural-born gifts while also establishing the foundation for his eventual greatness.

Statistics: Thanks to a combination of "retro counts" conducted off video and live counts of his final three fights against Hearns, Mugabi and Leonard, CompuBox has assembled data for all 15 world title fights. In those, Hagler was an offensive powerhouse; he averaged 65.7 punches per round – well above the 53.3 middleweight average – landed 8.8 jabs per round at a 36% clip (far exceeding the division norms of 4.3 and 19%, respectively) and connected on 43.2% of his total punches and 47% of his power shots compared to the division standards of 29% and 37%, respectively. Moreover, he averaged 28.4 total connects per round (nearly double the 15.6 middleweight average) and 19.5 landed power shots per round compared to the 11.2 average. On defense, however, Hagler was nothing special if one looks at the entirety of his reign: His opponents hit him with 31.1% of their overall punches (slightly above the 29.1% norm), 16% of their jabs (slightly better than the 19% norm) and 39.7% of their power shots (somewhat worse than the 36.5% average).





An all-time great middleweight, Hagler was comfortable around fistic royalty like Archie Moore (left) and Jake LaMotta.

However, Hagler's numbers improve markedly, especially on defense, if one narrows the sample to just his title fight wins against Alan Minter through his final 1983 triumph against Duran. In these nine fights, Hagler was even more effective on offense (64.6 punches per round, 10.4 landed jabs per round and landing 47.2% of his total punches, 41.4% of his jabs and 50.9% of his power shots) while producing better numbers on defense (he yielded 23.2% overall, 12% jabs and 33.1% power. He averaged 30.5 landed punches per round and 20.1 power connects per round, all well above the 160-pound averages. This is the Hagler most envision when comparing him to his peers, and, as the accompanying table shows, his numbers stack up very well with those long-tenured champions for whom CompuBox has comprehensive data.

Quality of Opposition: Because of the era in which he fought, Hagler couldn't approach the huge numbers assembled by Greb, Flowers, Walker, Steele, Robinson and LaMotta, but, for his time, Hagler's overall ledger and his title-fight lineup was solid. Hagler fought seven men who won widely recognized titles during their careers (Minter, Antuofermo, Fulgencio Obelmejias, Duran, Hearns, Mugabi and Leonard) and though he didn't emerge unscathed, he was willing to fight what Hagler called "The Iron" (Willie Monroe, Bennie Briscoe, Bobby Watts and Eugene "Cyclone" Hart) in their backyard of Philadelphia. He avenged his losses to Monroe and Watts by scoring two KOs over the former (the second in Philadelphia) and one against the latter (in Portland, Maine). The initial loss to Monroe in March 1976 would be his last until his disputed defeat to Leonard 11 years later, and during that stretch, he stopped a pair of Sugar Rays in Seales (their third meeting) and Phillips (who lasted seven rounds in 1977), halted the then-undefeated Mike Colbert as well as Philly veteran Willie Warren, and stopped Kevin Finnegan twice.

According to respected historian Henry Hascup, Hagler fought 31 times against men rated in The Ring's top 10 at one time or another, assembling a record of 26-3-2, and 19 times against those who were top-10 rated when he fought them, going 16-2-1. Compare these to the stats Hascup assembled for Walker (41-14-5 versus those rated at any time, 20-9-4 against top-10ers at the moment), Robinson (85-17-3; 42-13-2), Monzon (22-0-1; 15-0), Hopkins (27-7-2; 20-6-1) and Golovkin (13-2-1; 11-2-1). As for Greb, Hascup said he was only rated by The Ring in 1925 and 1926 but determined that he fought 109 times against top names and went 86-14-9 against them.

Joe Frazier once told Hagler he had three strikes against him ("You're black, you're a southpaw, and you're good."), and thus he had to travel a long, hard road (six and a half years, 49 pro fights) that included countless call-outs of the champions before he received his first title shot. In the end, however, Hagler benefited from it, as his title reign would prove.

Title Reign: Hagler recorded 12 successful defenses, fourth all-time behind Hopkins' 20, Golovkin's 18 over two reigns and Monzon's 14. Unlike the others, all but three of Hagler's defenses (including the Leonard loss) involved all of the available alphabet hardware, compared to Monzon's 10 of 14, Hopkins' three of 20 and Golovkin's zero for 18. Hopkins holds the divisional record for longest continuous reign at 10 years and 82 days, while Monzon held a version of the title for six years and 297 days, Hagler for six years and 192 days and Golovkin for five years and 219 days in his first reign (excluding his 24-plus months as a secondary WBA titlist). Bob Fitzsimmons owned the middleweight title for four years and 291 days but only defended it once, but on the other end of the scale, Greb was champion for two years and 180 days but notched six defenses before controversially losing it to Flowers.

Boston Globe

For those who solely recognize lineal status, Hagler and Monzon were recognized as such for the entirety of their reigns, and, according to the website Titlehistories.com, Walker vacated his claim after four years, 199 days upon moving up to heavyweight, while Zale's first of two stints was artificially lengthened to five years, 231 days by World War II. Robinson's five tenures totaled four years and 90 days, and Hopkins' status lasted three years and 291 days (from his win over Felix Trinidad to his first loss to Jermain Taylor). Golovkin, whose widely recognized title tenures totaled more than nine years, was never considered the lineal champion, according to the website.

Hagler was willing to fight anyone to keep his belts until he finally drew the big names. In all, according to Hascup, Hagler fought four times against Ring No. 1 challengers (Mustafa Hamsho twice, Wilford Scypion and Mugabi), two No. 2s (Sibson and Duran), two No. 4s (Obelmejias I and Antuofermo II), one No. 5 (Roldan) and one No. 6 (Obelmejias II). Leonard was unrated, while Hearns, Antuofermo (first fight) and Minter were reigning titleholders.

Summary: The preponderance of the evidence suggests Hagler is worthy of top-shelf status. He produced long-term dominance over his era, passed the "eye test" with flying colors and compared favorably with other legends in multiple categories.

As for the "Middleweight Mount Rushmore," there has long been talk of adding a fifth head to the genuine article, and such should be the case here. Greb should be there for the extreme depth and breadth of his record beyond his reign, and Robinson merits inclusion because many consider him the pound-for-pound GOAT. While Robinson's overall record in widely recognized 160-pound title fights is a spotty 8-6-1 (which explains his less-than-stellar stats), he avenged his title-fight losses to Randy Turpin and Gene Fullmer by KO and to Carmen Basilio by split decision. Hagler deserves his spot in the lineup for the reasons detailed in this article, as does Monzon (who ended his career with a prodigious 80-fight unbeaten streak, according to BoxRec.com) and Hopkins (for his extreme longevity and record-setting numbers).

Following his one-round knockout of William "Caveman" Lee, Marvin Nathaniel Hagler legally became Marvelous Marvin Hagler. All great nicknames boast an element of truth, and, in Hagler's case, his moniker perfectly characterizes who he was and how he performed in the ring. RING

Lee Groves is a boxing writer and historian based in Friendly, West Virginia. He is a full member of the BWAA, from which he has won 22 writing awards, including two first-place awards, since 2006. He has been an elector for the International Boxing Hall of Fame since 2001 and is also a writer, researcher and punch-counter for CompuBox, Inc. as well as a panelist on In This Corner: The Podcast *on YouTube. He is the author of* Tales from the Vault: A Celebration of 100 Boxing Closet Classics *and the co-author of* Muhammad Ali: By the Numbers *as well as the 2022 winner of the BWAA's Marvin Kohn "Good Guy Award." To contact Groves, use the email l.groves@frontier.com or send him a message via Facebook and Twitter @leegrovesboxing.*

COMPUBOX
EVERY PUNCH COUNTS EST. 1985

HAGLER'S STATISTICAL RANKING AMONG ALL-TIME GREAT MIDDLEWEIGHTS

COMPUBOX CATEGORIES

FIGHTER (#FIGHTS)	+/-	TOTAL LND/RD	TOTAL THR/RD	TOTAL CONN %	JABS LND/RD	POWER LND/RD	POWER CONN %	OTC%	OPC%	OPP LND/RD
BERNARD HOPKINS(24)	+14.8	18.7	50.4	37.1%	2.7	16	45.5%	22.3%	30.2%	8.9
MARVIN HAGLER(15)	+12.1	28.4	65.7	43.2%	8.8	19.5	47%	31.1%	39.7%	17.3
GENNADY GOLOVKIN(20)	+10.2	24.5	65.5	37.4%	10.3	14.3	44.1%	27.2%	35.6%	13.1
CARLOS MONZON(15)	-2.9	19.3	84.7	22.8%	5.7	13.6	36.8%	25.7%	30.4%	11
RAY ROBINSON(12)	-1.1	13.4	47.9	28%	4.2	9.2	40.5%	29.1%	33.7%	12.9
CompuBox Avg.		15.6	54.3	28.7%	4.2	11.4	36%	28.7%	36%	15.6

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

HAGLER, AN OFFENSIVE MACHINE, RANKS #1 IN 4 OF 6 CATEGORIES LISTED ABOVE & #2 IN JABS LANDED PER RND & #2 in PLUS/MINUS:

PUNCHES LANDED PER ROUND: Hagler landed 28.4 punches per round, 13 more than middle. avg. Only Hagler & GGG landed 20-plus per round.

TOTAL CONN. PCT.: Hagler landed 43.2% of his punches, 14% higher than middle avg. Only Mayweather, at 46%, landed a higher career pct.

JABS LANDED PER ROUND: Hagler, known more as a brawler, surprisingly #2 with 8.8 jabs landed per round

POWER LANDED PER ROUND: Hagler landed 19.5 power punches per round, nearly 2x the middle. avg.

POWER CONN. PCT.: Hagler landed 47% of his power punches, 18% higher than middle. avg.

A FIFTY-YEAR *HURRICANE*

ONE OF BOB DYLAN'S MOST FAMOUS SONGS PUT A SPOTLIGHT ON THE IMPRISONMENT OF MIDDLEWEIGHT CONTENDER **RUBIN "HURRICANE" CARTER**

By Don Stradley

Bob Dylan's explanation was simple. He'd read about Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, the former middleweight contender serving prison time for a triple murder, and felt the man was innocent.

Dylan's song "Hurricane," written in collaboration with Jacques Levy, became a staple of FM rock radio during the winter of 1975. Fifty years later, Dylan's angry voice, backed by the ominous violin of Scarlet Rivera, still sounds like a righteous call to action: "Here comes the story of the Hurricane / The man the authorities came to blame / For somethin' that he never done / Put in a prison cell, but one time he could-a been / The champion of the world …"

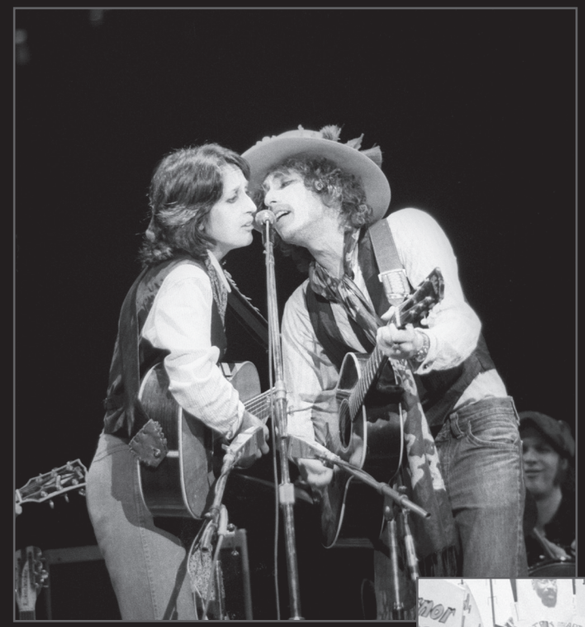
Dylan loaded the song with images of men lying in pools of blood and bigoted cops in the hot New Jersey night, taking dead aim at an ugly injustice: the imprisonment of an innocent man. Columbia Records rush-released it as a single in early November, well in advance of Dylan's forthcoming album *Desire*. More than eight minutes long with certain words bleeped out, "Hurricane" was unlikely to join the soundtrack of the holiday season – but it did. Roaring out of car speakers and dormitory radios, it fought for airplay against songs by David Bowie and Elton John. It eventually reached number 33 on the Billboard Hot 100. But would the song have any effect on Carter's predicament?

In 1966, Carter and another man, John Artis, were arrested for the murder of three people in a Paterson, New Jersey, barroom. Though both denied any part in the slayings, they were found guilty. Calling the crime a "cold-blooded massacre," Judge Samuel A. Larner handed Carter and Artis three life sentences apiece. However, when two witnesses for the state recanted their testimonies, support for Carter and Artis grew. Carter published a book about his situation, and by 1975 his cause had attracted a legion of celebrity activists. With his shaved head, tinted granny glasses and drooping mustache, Carter looked the part of an angry Black revolutionary ready to fight his oppressors. The country was soon awash in "Free Rubin" T-shirts and bumper stickers. The move was on to secure Carter a new trial.

With Dylan's song on the airwaves, plans were made for him to headline a fundraiser for Carter at Madison Square Garden. But first, Dylan, Joni Mitchell and others sang at the Clinton Correctional Institution where Carter was held. The set of hippie folk-rock bombed with the prison audience, though Carter declared "Hurricane" was "a fantastic piece of work."

On December 8, 1975, Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue performed at Madison Square Garden, proceeds going to Carter's appeal for a retrial. It was a star-studded event with an appearance by Muhammad Ali as a guest speaker. Ali had been named co-chairman of the Hurricane Trust Fund and had led rallies for Carter in Newark and Trenton. The audience of 20,000 cheered Ali at first, but they'd paid the then-outrageous price of $12.50 per ticket and didn't want to hear Ali talk. It was an odd mix: Ali reportedly didn't know who Dylan was, while audience members surveyed by the United Press showed no particular interest in Carter. At one point, Ali phoned Carter at CCI, inviting Carter's family members onstage to talk to him. This went over well, but when Ali brought a Tennessee politician up to speak, the crowd booed them both off the stage. Fortunately, Dylan gave a high-spirited performance, and the night was considered a success.

But even as the movement to free Carter gained momentum, music critics were divided by "Hurricane." Many admired it, but some felt it was trivial and, as rock critic Dave Marsh described it, "a little sophomoric." Dylan had sung about boxers in the past – his 1963 song "Who Killed Davey Moore?" lamented the death of a fighter in the ring – but in 1975, the Dylan



Dylan: Icon and Image/Ali: Bettmann

Top: Bob Dylan and Joan Baez onstage in 1975. Below: Muhammad Ali at a rally to support Rubin Carter.

acolytes wanted more than a song about a railroaded middleweight. Adversaries dismissed "Hurricane" because it told only Carter's side of the story. Patty Valentine, a witness mentioned unfavorably in the song's lyrics, filed a lawsuit against Columbia Records, Dylan and others. Her case was dismissed, but it attracted more bad press.

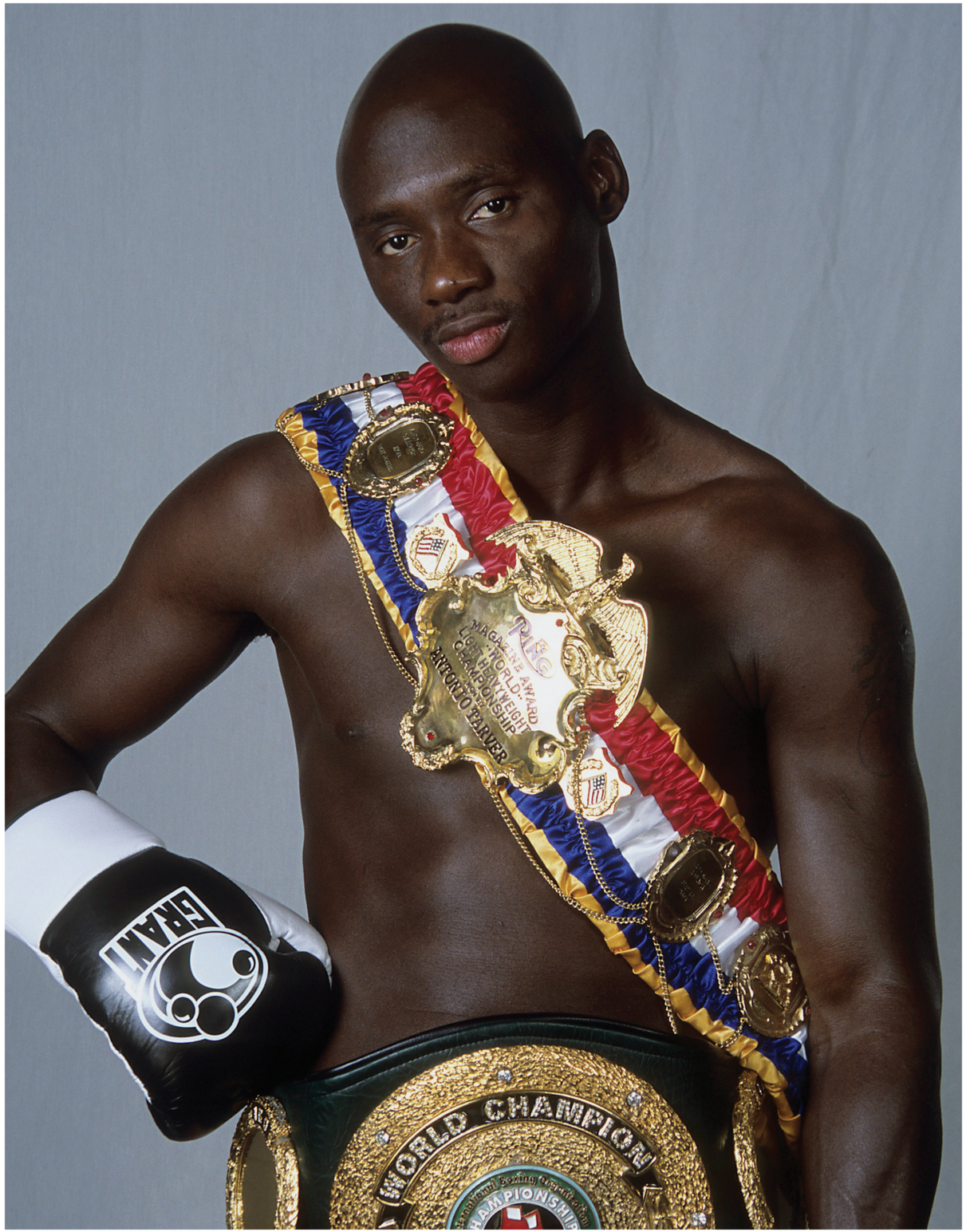
The Carter campaign's slick packaging was also unraveling. Some of Carter's earliest supporters resigned because there was so much infighting. They felt they'd made Carter into a folk hero but had lost sight of the judicial issues. Worse, the leader of the defense committee, Carolyn Kelley, accused Carter of assaulting her while he was out on bail. She didn't press charges, though Kelley's claim hurt Carter's image. Meanwhile, the ambitious New York concert was followed by a disastrous, money-losing sequel at the Houston Astrodome. Plans for other "Free Rubin" events were dropped. "Hurricane Carter has been a healthy carcass of a cause," reported Rolling Stone, "picked over by a lot of people."

Carter and Artis eventually earned a joint retrial in 1976, only to be reconvicted. Prolonged legal hearings would ultimately see Artis released in 1981, while Carter was freed in 1985. The Passaic County Superior Court dismissed the murder charges against both men in 1988.

George Lois, the advertising guru behind the "Free Rubin" campaign, later claimed Carter was dismissive of the help he'd received. According to Lois' book $ellebrity, Carter felt the celebs who had supported him were merely "motivated to gain attention for themselves, or to reap profits." Indeed, many celebrities appeared to distance themselves from Carter after the reconviction. It was also revealed that Ali, a key supporter of the cause, disliked Carter. (Though Carter was usually gracious to him, a 2019 BBC World Service podcast, "The Hurricane Tapes," featured a recording of Carter badmouthing Ali.) Even Dylan seemed to pull away. The secretive singer was uneasy with the Carter camp's disarray.

The popular myth of Carter lingered, though, culminating in a somewhat fictionalized 1999 movie with Denzel Washington as Carter. Ultimately, Carter was a difficult man to know. Some praised him, others called him a con artist. He became an activist himself, working for others who had been wrongfully convicted. He died in 2014.

As for Dylan, he hasn't performed "Hurricane" since the 1970s, explaining that the song's "moment" had come and gone. He did meet with Carter a couple of times over the years, at concerts for quick photo ops. Yet as Dylan told journalist Bill Flanagan in 1985, anything to do with Carter, whether the case, his personality or the efforts to free him, was "complicated." But even if he dropped the song from his repertoire, Dylan played it when it most counted. Fifty years on, the song is still a reminder of music's power to communicate. It may not have been entirely accurate, but the song wasn't meant to be Carter's biography. It was an anthem, a news headline set to music and raised like a flag before going into battle. Celebrities may have forgotten Carter, but the song stayed in the head of anyone who heard it, embedded there like a stake in the dirt. If Dylan moved on, it was only because his work was done. RING



My First Time

Antonio Tarver

As told to Tom Gray

Antonio Tarver will always be remembered as the man who switched the lights out on the legendary Roy Jones Jr. However, there was so much more to the Orlando-born southpaw, who possessed a superlative ring IQ and impeccable timing. An Olympic bronze medal at the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta preceded a glittering professional career, but it was The Magic Man's early development that paved the way for his unique blend of ring sorcery.

THE FIRST TIME I LACED UP THE GLOVES

"I was part of a boys and girls club in Orlando. All the kids from the inner cities would do that kind of thing in the summer. We had all kinds of sporting activities and we would go on field trips. There was a football team, a basketball team and a boxing team.

"Being 9 or 10 years old, I wasn't really interested at that time. I was just being a kid. I was from one side of the city and a lot of us would meet with kids from the other side of the city. I was an active kid, but I'd get into altercations and fights most of the time. The director of the club said, 'Hey man, we're going to have to do something about you. The next time you get in a fight, we're going to make you put the gloves on.' It was sort of like a punishment.

"There were seven or eight guys on the boxing team, and I hadn't paid any attention to it. But the first time I put on gloves, no one told me what to do or explained the rules. I stepped in there with heart, toughness and the willingness to fight.

"My boy JoJo Harris was a standout member of the team. Me and JoJo sparred, but I don't know why they thought I was good enough to be in there with him. We got in there and the dude hit me to the body. I had no defense and didn't even know if that was legal. He belted me so hard and I lost my breath and fell down. I was hurt and had no experience, but I sucked it up. I sucked it up and, believe it or not, I was back on my feet and fighting again.

"That amateur team was almost like a Kronk situation, but these guys never got out of the city. They never lived out the dream of becoming a champion or going to the Olympics. But they were so talented, and we learned together. We had a great coach, who I lost about five years ago, Jimmy Williams. He was training me at 10 years old, so I was able to be advanced in boxing at a young age.

"The fighters I was around were so good it was crazy. There was a guy who got killed, one of my best friends, his name was Maxie. He died around 1990, and I only found out about two years ago that he had a win over the great Roy Jones Jr. Roy told me that, and that shows you how good this team was. That team boxed against the Gray brothers (acclaimed amateur fighters from Florida).

"Some of the guys I came up with had solid pro careers, like Greg Young and Bruce Johnson. Bruce Johnson fought Buster Drayton. And there was Harvey Hester. These were the guys I was training with at 10, 11, 12 years old. Sam Johnson was a sparring partner for Marvin Hagler. Greg Young sparred with Marvin Hagler. These guys were older than me, but I was the young brat who was hanging around trying to learn how to box.

"I was the only one who really made it."

MY FIRST AMATEUR FIGHT

"It was the AAUs at the Eddie Graham Sports Stadium [in Orlando] in 1979. That was a famous stadium that used to have all the wrestling in the late '70s and early '80s. I'll never forget it, because I won my first trophy with the little boxing man on it. We had a team where everywhere we traveled, they knew we were coming to get all the trophies and all the belts. I was maybe 88 pounds, really light, and I'd win trophies that were taller than me.

"I don't remember the name of the kid I fought, but I knocked him out in 38 seconds. Back then, I was fighting orthodox, because this was at a time when no one boxed southpaw. It was just foreign, and no one worked on it. I was in the gym and there were no southpaws, so I just started doing what everyone else was doing. I'm just following suit, and I don't know that I'm supposed to be on the other side. (laughs hysterically) I'm naturally left-handed, but I was orthodox through my amateur career up until 14. I didn't know anything about being a southpaw until I came back to boxing [five and a half years later]. I taught myself how to box southpaw.

"The kid I fought in my first amateur fight, I knocked him out with a leaping left hook from the orthodox stance. That

was my signature punch back then, and I threw it so effortlessly from anywhere. If you look at my fight against Elvir Muriqi (UD 12 in June 2007), I fought orthodox in [portions of] that fight. Look at my jab. Look at my left hook. I didn't give many people that look, but I can box orthodox at the drop of a dime.

"After all our fights in the amateurs, we looked forward to going to McDonald's or Burger King. We'd go in there and get four or five Happy Meals, and we'd look forward to that shit. (laughs) We'd travel for four or five hours to amateur tournaments and come back really late at night. That camaraderie, that structure really helped me at a young age."

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL FIGHT

FEBRUARY 18, 1997

OPPONENT: JOAQUIN GARCIA

"Nobody thought I was going to make a mark in boxing after the Olympics. They pretty much folded on me. So my pro debut wasn't normal for an Olympian. Floyd [Mayweather] had taken off. Fernando [Vargas] took off. David Reid took off.

"It was just me, Jimmy Williams, who was one of the greatest trainers of all time, and my cut lady for my whole career, Angela Mitchell. It was a small-ass dressing room. I mean, the whole card was in there. You're in there looking at the guy you're gonna fight! (laughs hysterically) He's wrapping up right next to you! In the amateurs, I got everything first-class, and now I'm back on skid row.

"The fight took place at the Blue Horizon [in Philadelphia], which is gritty, it's dark, it's small. It feels like the crowd is right on top of you there, but it's full of very knowledgeable boxing fans. They really love the sport, and it was a great start.

"At that time, [boxing promoter] Russell Peltz wasn't just about building fighters and champions – it was all about the event. He's going to put you in there, and he wasn't protecting you. That wasn't even thought about. The only way you were protected was to fight and win.

"Garcia came out with his aggression and his attitude like most fighters. He thought his aggression was going to slow me down and stop me, so I just went about things systematically, set my traps and worked my magic. I landed a counter left, there were some uppercuts, and I won by stoppage in Round 2.

"What I remember most was it was the first time I wore the top hat with the cane. It was 'Welcome to The Magic Man' and it was a beautiful thing. I had the magic colors on, too. My color scheme is black, metallic silver and grey. I had a nice blue suede boot to match my uniform. At that time, we were on a budget and we didn't have a lot of resources. I think someone I knew made my outfit for me, just sewed that shit together.

"After the fight, I spent some time with the fans in the hotel lobby." RING

Tarver's distinguished amateur career led to Olympic bronze in 1996.

OMAR TORRES

Jed Jacobsohn

MY PERFECT PUNCH

MAY 15, 2004
OPPONENT: ROY JONES JR.

"The knockout of Roy Jones Jr. changed the game and changed my life.

"I can say a lot of things, but that punch came down to a lot of work, a lot of practice, a lot of reps. You just throw the perfect punch at the perfect time. It's what I already knew going into that fight – it was my time and there wasn't anything anyone could do about it. I earned it and I believed it.

"After falling on hard times and being out of the game for over five years, I turn on the TV and Roy Jones is in the ring [at the Seoul Olympics]. Now remember, I'd fought Roy at the Sunshine Games and he'd beat me, but it was a hell of a fight. It was the two best guys in Florida. I won the first round, he rocked me in the second round, and he won the third round. Roy won a split decision. But when I look back now, Roy had his daddy with him, he was more experienced, and he was stronger than everyone else. Roy had a reputation in Florida, but I gave him a hell of a fight.

"After watching Roy get robbed in the Olympics, my plan was to win the gold that eluded him. He was my homeboy from Florida. That's what inspired me to get back into boxing, chasing the Olympics. I did that, but it wasn't until later that Roy started campaigning in the light heavyweight division [as a professional]. My dream after the Olympics was to be the best world champion I could be, so I switched my goal to fight Roy.

"All of that led to that punch. I was robbed in the first fight (lost MD 12) and, to be honest, the second fight was a curse. What have I really got from that other than disdain and hate? I didn't get no credit for it – they took that, too. I didn't get any real praise or credit for that. Do you know how many people I walk up to with a smile on my face and they say, 'Man, you broke my heart!' I never really got respect for knocking out Roy Jones.

"And I proved it wasn't a fluke when I beat him again." RING

You can follow Antonio Tarver on Facebook, Instagram and X. The former four-time light heavyweight champion's podcast, Tarver's Take, is available on YouTube.

FIGHT DOCTOR

THE "UNOFFICIAL" TEAM MEMBER

By Dr. Margaret Goodman

Knowing when a fight should be stopped is just one of many crucial roles played by the ringside physician.

Working a fight can often seem like going into battle for officials. The ringside physician, an independent contractor appointed by the commission, is there to enable a bout to safely proceed to its natural conclusion. In that way, they are an "unofficial" part of the fighter's team. Their involvement isn't just ringside but begins long before the athlete steps between the ropes.

Many question how doctors can be part of a sport where the "intent" is to injure the opponent. Thirty-year Connecticut chief ringside physician Michael Schwartz notes, "My view changed when I started looking at outcome, not intent, and looked to create protocols where we can improve the safety of boxing and MMA before the competitor enters the ring."

Professional boxing has no national/international governing body like the National Football League, National Hockey League or international soccer. So it has always been up to the physicians working combat sports to place their own safety measures when it relates to injuries.

"I believe the sport in general is more aware in preventing the acute and chronic injuries associated with combat sports, including chronic headaches, dizziness, orthopedic and brain injuries," says Nitin Sethi, the New York chief physician. Prefight testing has expanded through the years. In most jurisdictions, to be licensed, fighters must undergo yearly private physicals, brain scans (MRI/CT), eye exams, EKG, lab work that includes HIV/hepatitis B and C and a more extensive stress test for those over 40 years of age. Drs. Schwartz and Sethi, who have also worked Riyadh Season events, review these medicals – and that includes matchups. "I look to see how many times a fighter has been stopped and when," says Schwartz. "I also review numerous anonymous messages to look into a fighter who might be suffering from chronic damage or has been knocked out in the gym."

Dr. Sethi, an experienced, board-certified neurologist, reviews more detailed and often repeated testing for brain injury: "In New York, we advise the promoter why an MRI needs repeating due to an abnormal finding, or why you are denying licensure – like for an aneurysm (ballooning of an artery). Yes, we get pushback, but your goal should always be the safety of the athlete." That pushback can be strong. As a former Nevada medical advisory board chair, there were times when a promoter campaigned against me working ringside when I recommended one of their fighters be denied a license.

At the weigh-in, ringside physicians complete an exam that includes asking the athlete about their training history. They review medical tests and medications the fighter might have taken leading up to the event. "We have a duty to not 'rubber stamp' a fighter," notes 23-year Nevada ring physician Damon Zavala. "I have called off fights at the weigh-in if the athlete looks too ill from trying to make weight. I ask those tough questions and know I will be backed up by the commission." But the evaluation doesn't stop there. Boxers are also briefly checked when they arrive at the venue. Years ago, a fighter in a Nevada event was on his way to the ring demonstrating an off-balance gait. He was immediately sent to the hospital, where they discovered a brain bleed. His life was saved.

Al Bello

At the venue, doctors meet with emergency medical services (EMS). Dr. Schwartz's team has a code to signal them in case of emergency. There is nothing more important than time to save a fighter's life. EMS must have proximity to the ring and dressing rooms, and they must make certain that emergency equipment is easily accessible ringside. No fight can take place unless at least one ambulance is present – at larger events, often there are at least two. This includes ensuring the physician and/or ambulance crew have ACLS (Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support) certification. If a fighter requires transport and only one ambulance is present, the event is halted until the ambulance returns or another comes. Nearby Level 1 Trauma Center hospitals with a neurosurgeon who can perform emergency brain surgery are alerted.

Beyond medical tests and examinations, it's crucial for doctors to meet with the assigned referees and share opinions on their match. Referees always have pertinent information, such as which fighter typically comes on late or more readily recovers from a punch or knockdown. "I ask the referee, 'Are you concerned about anybody?'" says Sethi. I always reviewed fight films and fighter interviews – as do Schwartz and Sethi. It helps to know how a fighter historically walks and talks, how they look when tired or how they handle punishment. Such minor changes during a bout could point to stopping the contest. It was always the fighters I couldn't find films/videos on that raised more concern when they were taking a beating.

New York may have up to seven physicians at an event. At least one works each corner, and one or two are in the back conducting post-fight exams and triaging fighters with injuries. There's nothing more important than placing the ring physician in the corner so they can listen to what the corner is saying between and during the rounds. Like the referee, the commission inspector watching the cornermen can alert the doctor regarding an injury or fighter complaint. The referee and I would always make eye contact after each round and trade signals regarding concerns.

"Working ringside is a lot of pressure; you get a lot of heat," says Sethi. "In New York, the doctor can stop a fight, but how do you stop a fight at the right time? Everyone at ringside has their own threshold in stopping a fight – the corner is their family; they have their own idea, and like the fighter they have a high threshold. The ringside doctor always has the lowest threshold, as they have an unbiased objective. That improves with experience."

Examining the fighter between rounds carries its own pressure for the ring physician. No one wants you there. The crowd boos; the corner tries to shoo you away; and the fighter always says he/she is OK. I've also had the corner urge me to stop a bout when their fighter had a cut from a clash of heads and they believed he was leading on the scorecards.

The physician won't get up on the ring apron unless there's an indication the fighter is hurt or the referee/inspector has signaled the doctor to take a look. Often, I would use that moment to insert my presence when I thought a stop should be imminent. Before leaving the ring, I'd share a few words with the referee. This also gives the referee more courage to let a bout go or pull the trigger when a fighter is taking unnecessary punishment and has little chance of success.

Every ring physician could write a book on cuts. Dr. Schwartz comments, "Cuts seldom stop a fight unless the fighter can't see or defend himself/herself. Blood is not the issue, so it depends on where the cut is. We always try to give the corner a chance to stop bleeding. What the public doesn't understand is the location can indicate potential injury to facial nerves and muscles. If the fighter can no longer see, the physician must intervene." He understands why a physician's decision could be criticized, but in truth, only that physician can appreciate the implications of not acting.

Irrespective of a loss or win, every fighter undergoes a post-fight exam. That may begin in the ring. A suspension is given as to indicate when the fighter can schedule another bout. There are automatic suspensions relating to the number of scheduled rounds, but a boxer could receive 30 or even as many as 180 days, depending on their injuries. If it appears there could be an undiagnosed hand injury or facial fracture, the suspension could be lessened once the athlete is cleared by a specialist. If he/she took considerable head shots or was kayoed, then they are immediately transferred to undergo a brain CT/MRI as well as additional neurological tests before the suspension is removed. Before fighters are discharged from the venue, they are handed paperwork describing symptoms requiring emergency attention and where to seek care.

Ringside medicine is training on the job. However, several years ago, Dr. Schwartz – also co-chair of the Association of Boxing Commissions Medical Committee – created the Association of Professional Ringside Physicians, where ring doctors meet, advance protocols and receive certification in an effort to expand uniformity. Yes, there have been positive changes to better protect boxers inside and outside the ring, but it's after the crowd and lights disappear for good when fighters desperately need continued care and support. Sadly, that too often remains a problem for many. RING

Dr. Margaret Goodman is a former Nevada State Athletic Commission chief physician, co-hosts the Fighter Health and Safety Podcast and is president of the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association.

Note: The opinions and comments of the physicians who contributed to this feature are their own and don't necessarily reflect the views of the organizations they serve.

THE FACE OF BOXING

Naoya Inoue:
The Quest for Greatness

Photographs by Wojtek Urbanek • Text by Thomas Hauser

Naoya Inoue has been grouped with the likes of Canelo Alvarez, Terence Crawford and Oleksandr Usyk at the top of boxing's pound-for-pound list for years. He currently holds The Ring's championship and all four major sanctioning body belts at 122 pounds, has won 22 of 22 world title contests, and earlier in his career annexed titles at 108, 115 and 118 pounds. His overall record stands at 29 wins against zero losses with 26 knockouts.

It's difficult to evaluate fighters in boxing's lightest weight divisions, because there are few inquisitors to test them. But Inoue's combination of speed, power and skill is indicative of greatness. His most impressive performance to date is an eighth-round stoppage of previously unbeaten Stephen Fulton in 2023. At the end of that year, The Ring and the Boxing Writers Association of America honored him as the Fighter of the Year.

Looking ahead, Inoue could go up in weight to 126 pounds, but there are no megafights waiting in that division. Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez would be an attractive opponent, but Rodriguez fights at 115 pounds and might find 122 pounds a bridge too far. That leaves WBC 118-pound titleholder Junto Nakatani as the most likely elite opponent for Naoya.

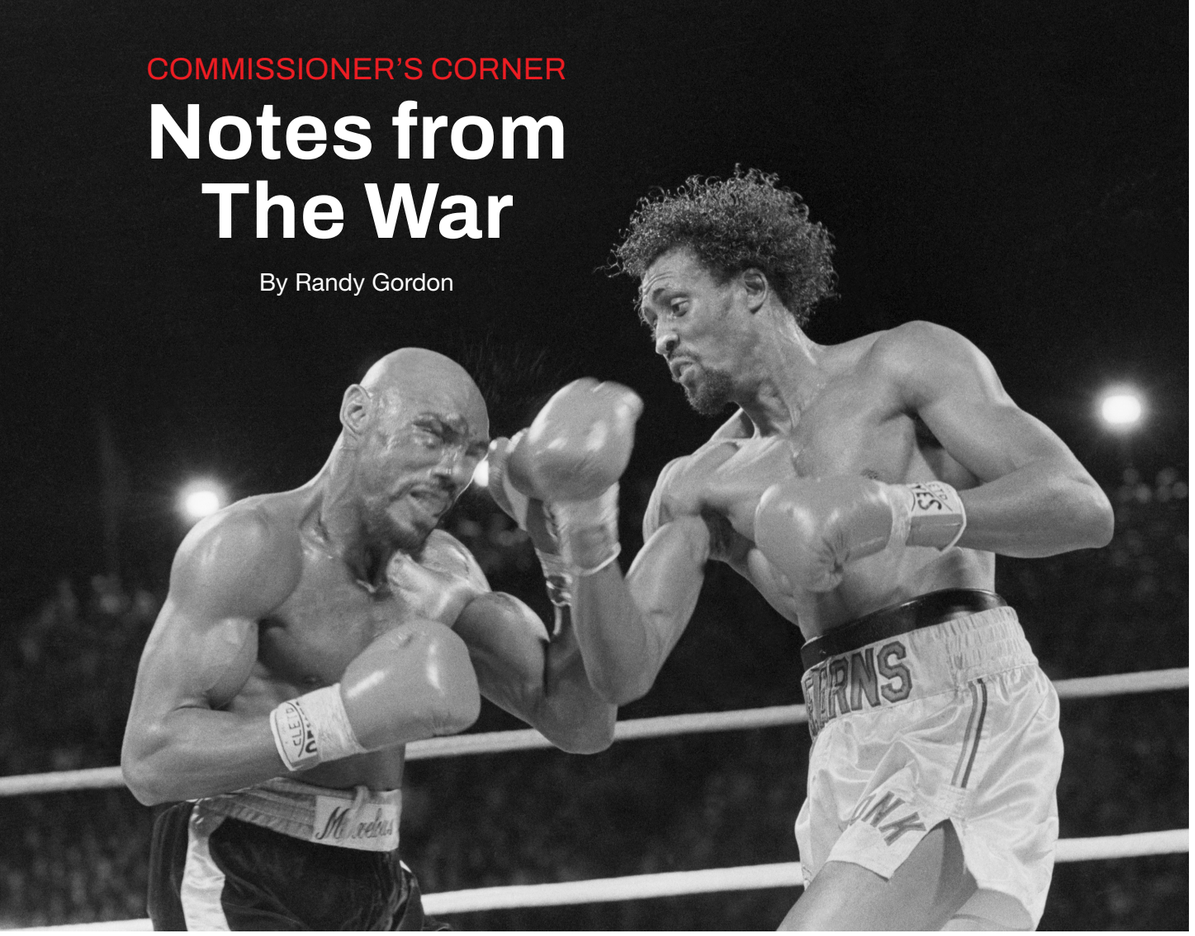
Meanwhile, every Inoue fight is a massive event in Japan, where he is among his country's most famous and popular athletes. His deferential, almost shy manner appeals to people from all walks of life. A partnership with Riyadh Season is expected to expand his profile outside of his native land. And it's a no-brainer that an International Boxing Hall of Fame ring like the one Naoya is gazing at on the opposite page will someday be on his finger. RING

© Wojtek Urbanek

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

Notes from The War

By Randy Gordon



As I sat in my home office to write this month's column, my eyes were drawn to a collage of photos on my wall. One in particular stood out. It was of me and Marvelous Marvin Hagler, taken in Canastota, New York, during the International Boxing Hall of Fame Induction Weekend in 2018.

I stared at the photo and smiled, thinking of many special moments I had spent with the Marvelous One, interviewing him, photographing him, even running on the beach with him in Cape Cod. As I stared at the photo, I realized another anniversary of his great fight against Thomas Hearns was upon us. But it's not just another anniversary. It's the 40th anniversary.

I decided to dedicate this column to that very special event.

April 15, 1985. On that mid-April night in Las Vegas, two middleweights gave us something exquisite, something unforgettable. It was something these eyes had never seen before – and something they probably never will again.

Even the trip to Las Vegas from New York was memorable. On that flight were some of the greatest boxing writers ever to use a typewriter (remember, in 1985, none of us had laptops).

There was Mike Katz, Bert Sugar, Barney Nagler, Dave Anderson, Pat Putnam, Dick Young, Budd Schulberg, Mike Marley and so many other veterans. If you are too young to remember who any of them were, I am giving you an assignment: Look them up!

In a brief, all-out war, Hagler and Hearns traded their sublime skills for stunning savagery.

Somewhere in mid-flight, Bert Sugar got into a loud, heated discussion with Dick Young – who was seated a few rows in front of us – over who would win the fight, and why. Neither man would back down.

Finally, Sugar threw a piece of cheesecake at Young. Young tossed it back. It missed Sugar and hit Mike Katz, who was sitting behind us. Cheesecake was all over his scruffy, black beard. Katz pulled the cheesecake pieces out of his beard and flung them all over the plane. Within seconds, an all-out high school-like food fight was underway.

Bettmann

The food fight ended minutes later when one of those missiles – a slice of chocolate cake – caused some collateral damage: an angry female flight attendant who was trying to stop the confectionery carnage.

THWACK! The cake hit her right between the eyes! She headed straight to the cockpit. Then came an announcement:

"This is the captain! If there is no immediate ceasefire (you could tell he was masking a laugh), I will be forced to make an immediate emergency landing at the nearest airport."

Sugar, Katz, Young and the rest of the food-throwers immediately resumed eating what was left of their desserts.

A few hours later, we landed in Las Vegas. You've never seen so many happy flight attendants!

A shower, a change of clothes and a walk to the hotel bar came next for seemingly every sportswriter who was on the flight. We also met up with many other top boxing writers, including the San Francisco Chronicle's Jack Fiske, the L.A. Times' Jim Murray, the Las Vegas Sun's Royce Feour, the Boston Herald's George Kimball, and Mike Downey of the Detroit Free Press.

We talked boxing, had drinks, and talked some more boxing. Who would win, Hagler or Hearns? And why? The vote seemed to be split.

Suddenly all eyes turned to me. I felt the gaze of seemingly every great columnist and boxing writer in America. What was wrong? I spun around on my barstool. Standing just to my left was Thomas Hearns' great manager and trainer, Emanuel Steward, who was playfully sneaking up on me. As soon as I noticed him, we embraced.

"I see who you're rooting for," said the AP's Ed Schuyler. While that wasn't the case, I had become very close with Steward during my years at The Ring. In fact, he was instrumental in helping me set up the cover-shot photo session with Hearns, the one that became known as "The Hitman" cover.

"Remember what I told you around a year ago?" Steward whispered to me. I thought for a moment.

"Tommy's quick start," he whispered. I smiled and nodded my head.

"Anything you can share with us?" inquired Katz.

"Manny just said you have some food stuck in your beard!" I replied.

It was at a one-on-one lunch I had with Steward in 1983 that Steward disclosed how much he wanted Hearns to face Hagler. At the time, Hearns was the Ring/WBC junior middleweight champion but rarely fought as a middleweight.

"Hagler can't outbox Tommy, he's nowhere near as quick as Tommy, and certainly doesn't carry Tommy's explosive power," Steward told me at that lunch.

"How would you fight Hagler?" I asked.

Steward smiled.

"Randy, I'm going to tell you something. Please don't put this in The Ring or talk about it on television. If the fight happens, I want it to be a surprise."

I looked at Steward.

"Promise?" he spoke.

"I promise," I replied, nodding my head.

"If the fight ever happens, we're coming out fast, guns blazing. It's not something Marvin will ever expect," Steward told me.

"Keep in mind, Marvin's got a great chin," I responded.

"Lots of guys have great chins," Steward replied. "Nobody has ever hit him the way Tommy is gonna hit him. There's only one Thomas Hearns right hand! We are coming out fast and making him taste Tommy's power early."

Point taken.

After Steward told me their fight plan, he put his right index finger to his lips.

I understood. I kept his words to myself.

Just like that, it was time to head to the makeshift arena at Caesars Palace. I had been there almost three years earlier for the Larry Holmes-Gerry Cooney bout and just over three and a half years prior for Sugar Ray Leonard-Thomas Hearns I.

Now here I was for the middleweight championship bout between Marvin Hagler and Thomas Hearns, along with the secret Emanuel Steward had told me.

Then came Chuck Hull's introductions:

"Introducing, in the red corner, the challenger, the WBC super welterweight champion, fighting out of Detroit, Michigan, weighing 159 and three-quarter pounds, his pro record is 40 wins, one defeat with 34 KOs. Ladies and gentlemen, here is Thomas 'The Hitman' Hearns!"

Hearns, in his bright yellow Kronk trunks with HEARNS emblazoned across the waistband in red, stretched, bowed to the crowd and threw his hands victoriously skyward.

I could hear my heart pounding.

Then Hull continued:

"And in the blue corner, fighting out of Brockton, Massachusetts, weighing 159 and one quarter pounds, with a professional record of 60 wins, two defeats, two draws and 50 KOs … Ladies and gentlemen, the undisputed middleweight champion of the world … Marvelous (pause) Marvin (pause) Hagler!"

The referee was one of the best in boxing, Nevada's own Richard Steele. The judges – whom we were all sure wouldn't be needed – were Harry Gibbs, Herb Santos and Dick Young (unrelated to the sportswriter).

At the bell, Hearns walked toward mid-ring and quickly circled to his left.

Hagler came out boxing as a southpaw, something we all wondered if he would do. Almost immediately, he threw a hard right hook at Hearns, which missed. He came back immediately with a straight left to the body.

Hearns fired sharp jabs at Hagler, who was staying low and moving his

head as he pressured Hearns.

Then, with about 20 seconds gone, Hearns bounced off the ropes to the right of his corner. Hagler then forced him to the ropes on the other side of his corner.

"NOW, TOMMY! NOW!" Steward yelled from the corner.

Hearns must have heard him. He pulled the trigger on a volley of blows – right uppercuts, overhand rights and left hooks found Hagler's face and head. The first right cross seemed to shake him up. Hagler took a deep breath, then fired back, mainly aiming at Hearns' body.

The crowd was in a frenzy at the blistering start. Little did anybody know what they were in for.

"KEEP THROWING!" Steward yelled. I heard him. Hearns probably did, too, and he responded.

A hard right to the head by Hearns backed the champion up – but just for a moment. After missing badly with his southpaw left, Hagler switched to the orthodox stance, but only for a moment.

Hagler laid on heavy pressure, but Hearns was fighting successfully on his own terms.

Hearns moved left and right, and his faster hands and longer reach were giving him the edge.

But for every step Hearns took backward, Hagler took two forward. Any time Hearns found himself with his back to the ropes, he punched his way off of them, but before he could do much more than take a deep breath, Hagler was on his chest again.

Suddenly, during one of the exchanges, Hagler stepped away with a deep cut on his forehead, close to his right eyebrow. Blood poured from the wound.

As the bell rang, ending the round, both fighters returned quickly to their corners. Goody Petronelli – who, along with his brother Pat, managed, trained and cornered Hagler – was also known as one of the best cutmen in the sport. He was in the ring before the champion was ready to sit on his corner stool.

As he worked on the cut, Goody told Hagler, "It's not bad, not bad at all. Just keep doing what you're doing. Keep working him up and down. He can't withstand this pace."

In the opposite corner, Steward told Hearns: "Sharpshoot him with the jab, then use your one-twos.

"Nobody has ever hit him the way Tommy is gonna hit him. There's only one Thomas Hearns right hand! We are coming out fast and making him taste Tommy's power early."

You've got this!"

On the surface, it seemed that way. In reality, though, what none of us in the press section, in the packed stadium or watching on HBO PPV knew, was that Hearns had badly injured – even broken – his right hand in one of those exchanges in the first round. He was determined not to quit. In addition, he was spurred on by the cut on Hagler's forehead.

Round 2 was more of the same action, with both giving and both taking. As they returned to their respective corners, all the concern was on Hagler's cut.

"WORK THAT CUT! FINISH HIM!" yelled Steward.

In Round 3, with blood streaming down his face, Hagler knew he needed to force the action.

As I found my notes from the third and final round of that night 40 years ago, I will include them here:

ROUND 3: Hagler comes out boxing as a righty, looking like he wants to end it … he can't find the range and after about :30 switches to southpaw … lunges in a few times with a right hook … Hearns, on steady legs, pops several hard jabs into Hagler's bloodied face ... Action continues with Hearns moving and Hagler pressing … Hagler looking like he is willing to take a shot in order to land one … Hearns keeps moving and jabbing.

"BEAUTIFUL!" shouts Steward.

"KEEP DOING THAT!"

Hearns doing nice on the move behind a steady jab.

They tie up in a neutral corner with around 1:15 gone.

Steele calls "TIME!" He wants the doctor to check Hagler's cut.

The doctor allows the fight to continue.

An inspired Hearns slams two jabs and a right against Hagler's face.

Hagler comes back with a right hook.

Hearns steadily moving to his right, aiming for the cut.

Hagler pounds Hearns' body on the ropes.

Hearns dances away from the ropes but is dropping his hands to his waist after each punch.

A long right to Hearns' face turns his legs rubbery. He staggers badly. Hagler runs across the ring … Tommy backs to the ropes.

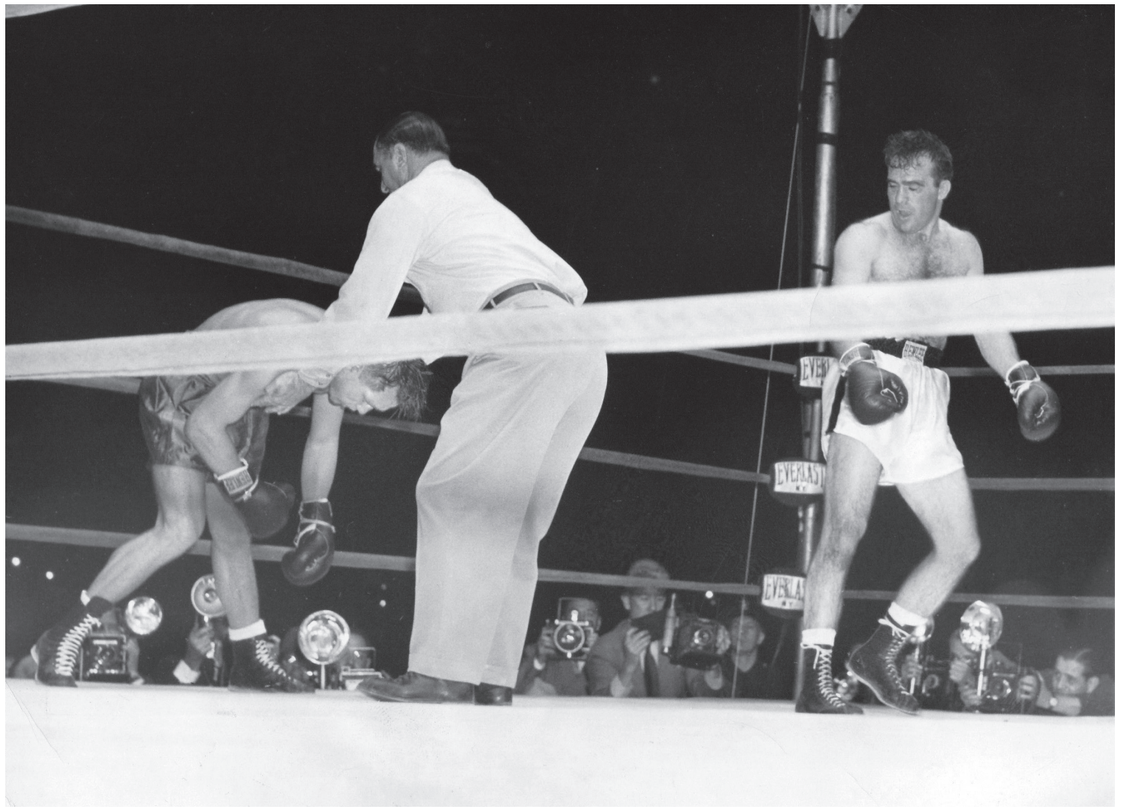
A pair of right hands to the head drops Hearns onto his back. He rolls over … gets up groggy at "9" and falls into referee Steele's arms, who waves it over at 1:52 of the round.

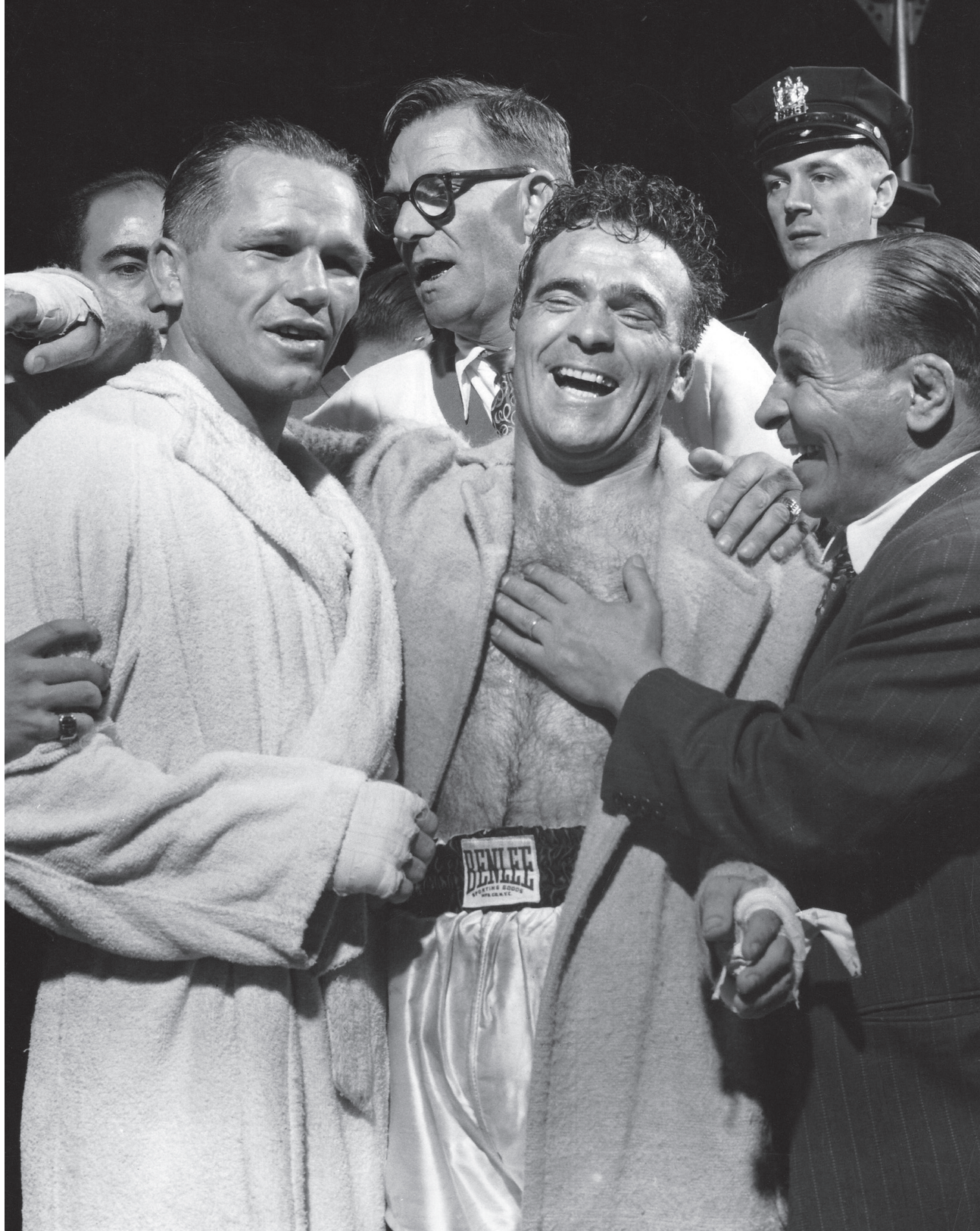
On the plane ride home, with many of the same guys I flew out with, there was no food fight.

There was only talk of the greatest middleweight championship fight any of us had ever seen. RING

FINISHING SHOTS

On September 21, 1948, Tony Zale attempted to make the first defense of his second reign as middleweight champ against 108-3 Frenchman Marcel Cerdan at the Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City. The underdog coming into the bout, Cerdan was largely in control against the "Man of Steel" and used his jab and a withering overhand right to rack up the points. While Zale had long established himself as an elite-level force at 160 pounds, his blood-and-guts trilogy with Rocky Graziano appeared to have drained his resources. Behind on points, he was unable to answer the bell for Round 12 and never fought again as a professional. Just over a year later, Cerdan was tragically killed in a plane crash. RING





FIGHTLINE

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face: A young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking one of the best fighters of the 1960s, Carlos Ortiz, with one of the most talented boxers of the current generation, Teofimo Lopez, who, like the underrated Puerto Rican hall of famer, is a two-division champ. Both wore the lightweight and junior welterweight crowns.

There are multiple paths linking the crafty boxer-punchers whose primes are separated by 60 years, but we've selected this nine-boxer Fightline. There's at least one way to get there faster. Can you find it?

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage the fights must come in chronological order. RING

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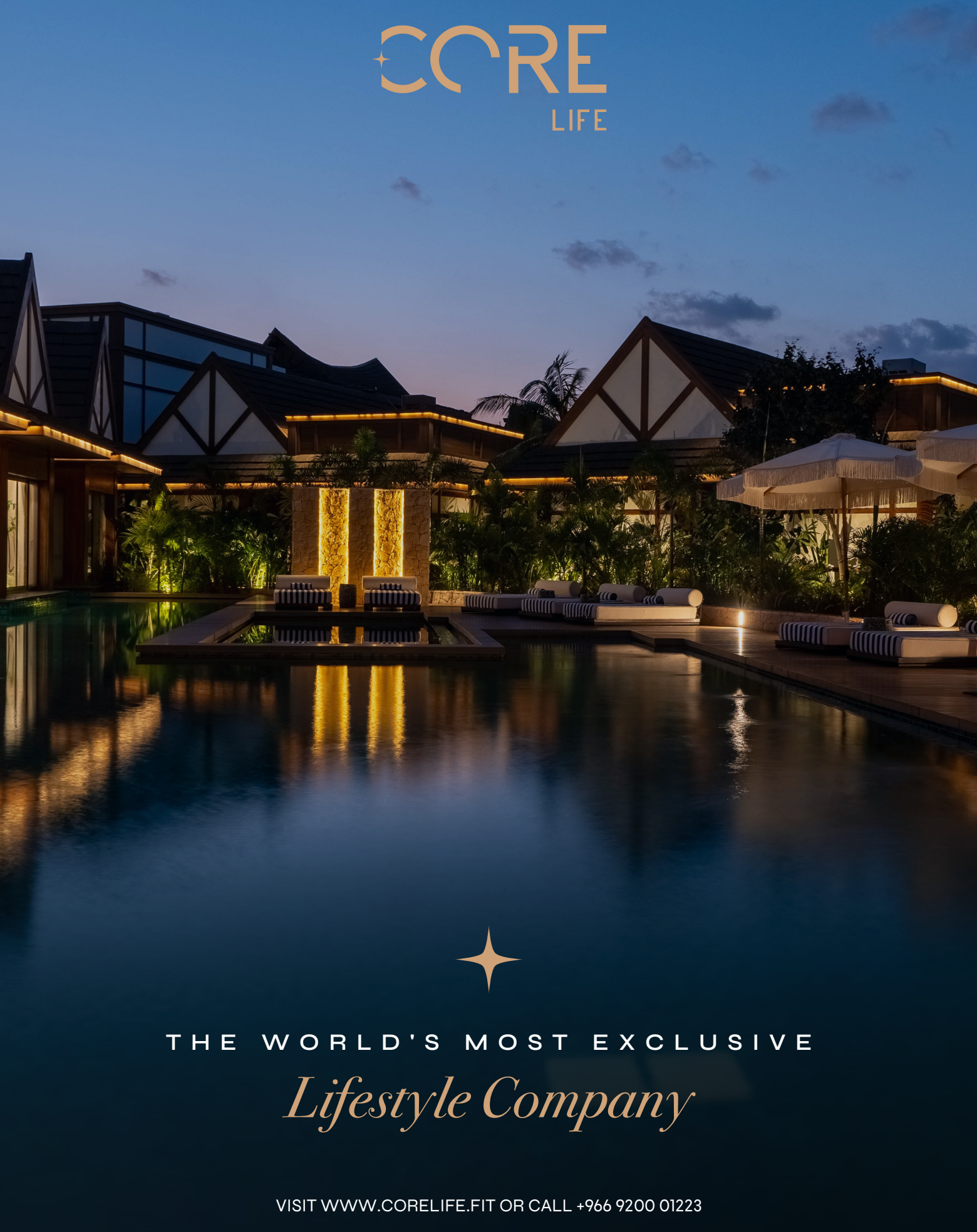
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